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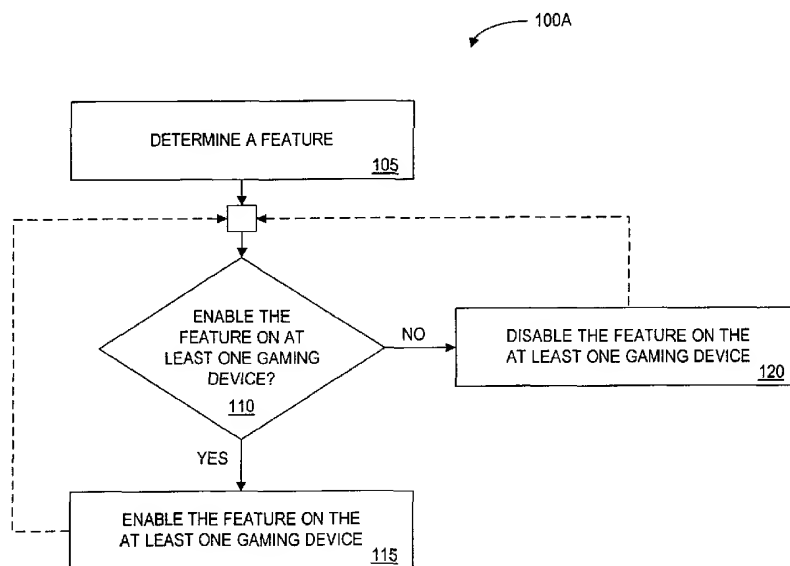
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(54) Title: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR ENABLING A PLAYER TO SELECT FEATURES ON A GAMING DEVICE



(57) Abstract: Process (100A) illustrates a method for determining whether a feature should be enabled on a gaming device. In step (105) a feature is determined. In step (110), the entity determines whether the determined feature should be enabled on at least one gaming device. In step (115) the feature is enabled on at least on gaming device. In step (120) if the feature should not be enabled, then the feature is disabled on at least one gaming device.



For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

**METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR ENABLING A PLAYER TO SELECT
FEATURES ON A GAMING DEVICE**

[0100] The present Application claims the benefit of:

- 5 (i) U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/373,761 filed April 18, 2002, entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR ENABLING A PLAYER TO SELECT FEATURES ON A GAME MACHINE", the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes; and also
- 10 (ii) U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/374,343 filed April 19, 2002, entitled "GAMING DEVICE METHODS AND APPARATUS EMPLOYING FEATURE MANAGEMENT", the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.

Cross-Reference to Related Applications

[0101] The present Application is related to the following commonly-owned,
15 co-pending U.S. Patent Applications:

- 20 (i) U.S. Patent Application No. 09/603,677, filed June 26, 2000, entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR SELECTING A SUPPLEMENTAL PRODUCT TO OFFER FOR SALE DURING A TRANSACTION", the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes;
- (ii) U.S. Patent Application No. 09/993,228, filed November 14, 2001, entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR DYNAMIC RULE AND/OR OFFER GENERATION", the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes;
- 25 (iii) U.S. Reissue Application No. 10/222, 523, filed August 16, 2002, entitled "GAMING DEVICE FOR OPERATING IN A REVERSE PAYOUT MODE AND A METHOD OF OPERATING SAME", the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes;

- (iv) U.S. Application No. 09/879,299, filed June 12, 2001, entitled
“SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR AUTOMATED PLAY OF
MULTIPLE GAMING DEVICES”, the entirety of which is
incorporated by reference herein for all purposes;
- 5 (v) U.S. Application No. 10/121,243, filed April 11, 2002, entitled
“METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR FACILITATING PLAY AT A
GAMING DEVICE BY MEANS OF THIRD PARTY OFFERS”, the
entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes;
- 10 (vi) U.S. Application No. _____, [Attorney Docket No. 02-021]
filed concurrently herewith, entitled “GAMING DEVICE METHODS
AND APPARATUS EMPLOYING MODIFIED PAYOUTS”, the
entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes;
- 15 (vii) U.S. Application No. _____, [Attorney Docket No. 02-010]
filed April 16, 2003, entitled “METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR
OPTIMIZING THE RATE OF PLAY OF A GAMING DEVICE”, the
entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes;
- 20 (viii) U.S. Application No. 10/361,201, filed February 7, 2003, entitled
“GAMING DEVICE AND METHOD OF OPERATION THEREOF”,
the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all
purposes;
- (ix) U.S. Application No. _____, [Attorney Docket No. 02-014] filed
April 15, 2003, entitled “METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR BONUS
ROUND PLAY”, the entirety of which is incorporated by reference
herein for all purposes;

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- (x) U.S. Application No. 10/328,116, filed December 20, 2002, entitled “METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR OUTPUTTING OUTCOMES OF A GAMING DEVICE”, the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes;
- 5 (xi) U.S. Application No. 10/254,831, filed September 25, 2002, entitled “METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR LINKED PLAY GAMING”, the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes;
- (xii) U.S. Application No. 10/007,874, filed November 12, 2001, entitled “ELECTRONIC AMUSEMENT DEVICE AND METHOD FOR PROPAGATING A PERFORMANCE ADJUSTMENT SIGNAL”, the
10 entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes;
and
- (xiii) U.S. Application No. 10/322,107, filed December 18, 2002, entitled “FREE LONG DISTANCE CALLS ON SLOT MACHINES”, the
15 entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.

Background

[0102] The present invention relates generally to methods and apparatus for managing features of games and of gaming devices.

[0103] Gaming devices (*e.g.*, reeled slot machines, video poker machines,
20 video keno machines, video blackjack, and video bingo machines) generate more than \$15 billion per year in revenue for casinos in the United States alone. This figure accounts for more than half of the gaming revenue for a typical United States casino. The situation is similar in other countries in which gaming devices are popular, such as Australia. Accordingly, casino operators and other operators
25 of gaming devices are interested in increasing the enjoyment of playing gaming devices in order to maintain or increase this level of revenue.

[0104] The operation of a gaming device and / or of a game may be affected by various parameters, options, and other features enabled for use on the gaming device. Such features can be used by a casino (or by a player) to enhance various

aspects of a player's experience at a gaming device. For example, a feature may be used on a gaming device to affect how the gaming device interacts with players, to alter a mode of operation of a game, to change how information is communicated to a player, or to modify the types of offers that can be made to a player at the gaming device.

[0105] A variety of features may be available to casino operators for enabling on gaming devices, and one or more features may be enabled for use on a gaming device at any given time. Accordingly, a player may be able to select from among several features available on a gaming devices.

10 [0106] To date, however, little if any attention has been paid as to how owners and operators of gaming devices may determine which features (or combinations of features) and / or games (or combinations of games) to make available on a gaming device, such as may provide the most satisfying entertainment experience for players, best promote the use of a gaming device, increase revenues of a gaming device, or lead to increased profitability of a gaming device.

[0107] Further, little if any attention has been paid as to how available features may be presented to players for selection on a gaming device.

Brief Description of the Figures

20 [0108] Fig. 1A is a flowchart depicting an exemplary process consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

[0109] Fig. 1B is a flowchart depicting an exemplary process consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

[0110] Fig. 1C is a flowchart depicting an exemplary process consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

25 [0111] Fig. 1D is a flowchart depicting an exemplary process consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

[0112] Fig. 2A is a block diagram of an exemplary system consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

[0113] Fig. 2B is a block diagram of another exemplary system consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

5 [0114] Fig. 3 is a block diagram of an exemplary computer consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

[0115] Fig. 4 is a block diagram of an exemplary gaming device consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

10 [0116] Fig. 5 is a table illustrating an exemplary data structure of a feature database consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

[0117] Fig. 6 is a table illustrating an exemplary data structure of a condition database consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

[0118] Fig. 7 is a table illustrating an exemplary data structure of a gaming device database consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

15 [0119] Fig. 8 is a table illustrating an exemplary data structure of a player database consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

[0120] Fig. 9A is a table illustrating an exemplary data structure of a performance database consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

20 [0121] Fig. 9B is a table illustrating another exemplary data structure of a performance database consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

[0122] Fig. 9C is a table illustrating another exemplary data structure of a performance database consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.
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[0123] Figs. 9D – 9E is a table illustrating another exemplary data structure of a performance database consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

5 [0124] Fig. 10 is a table illustrating exemplary data structure of an alternate payout database consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

[0125] Figs. 11A – 11K are plan views of exemplary gaming devices consistent with at least one embodiment of the present invention.

Detailed Description

10 [0126] The present application relates generally to allowing for player selection of features that enhance the operation of gaming devices and / or features that enhance the operation of one or more available games.

[0127] In accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, the operation of a gaming device (and / or of a game provided on the gaming device) may be affected by various parameters, options, and other features enabled for use on the gaming device. As discussed herein, such features may enhance various aspects of a player's experience at the gaming device. For example, a feature may be used on a gaming device to alter a mode of operation of the gaming device (*e.g.*, to alter a mode of operation of a game, to change how information is communicated to a player, to modify how payouts are determined for a player
15 20 (*e.g.*, by changing a payout table for a game), or to modify the types of offers that can be made to a player at the gaming device.

[0128] Applicants have recognized that, in some embodiments, players may find it appealing to be able to activate one or more features on a gaming device. Applicants have recognized that, in some embodiments, players may find it
25 appealing to be able to activate one or more features on a gaming device using an interface displayed (*e.g.*, on a display device) at the gaming device. Applicants have further recognized that, in some embodiments, players may find it appealing to have visual and / or audio cues output at a gaming device that indicate to the

players various types of information, including, but not limited to: (i) what features are enabled for use on the gaming device (*e.g.*, what features are available for selection by the player), (ii) what features are currently active on the gaming device (*e.g.*, which features have been selected by the player, which features are currently affecting operation of the gaming device), and (iii) other types of information about features (*e.g.*, a profit that a player could have made had a feature been enabled, prizes won by other players using a feature).

[0129] Applicants have further recognized that, in some embodiments, players may benefit from a display device operable to display an area containing game information and at least one area containing information related to one or more features available and / or active on a gaming device.

[0130] Applicants have also recognized that, in some embodiments, players may benefit from receiving information about one or more features. For example, some players may find it appealing to receive a description of a feature. In another example, some players may find it appealing to receive information about how past play could have been affected if one or more features had been active (*e.g.*, an amount the player could have won if a particular feature had been enabled). In another example, some types of players may find it appealing to receive information about the use of a feature by another player (*e.g.*, information about a prize that another player won while a feature was active).

[0131] Applicants have recognized that, in some embodiments, operators of gaming devices may benefit from being able to determine which of a plurality of features to enable for use on a gaming device. Applicants have also recognized that, in some embodiments, operators of gaming devices may benefit from being able to determine which of a plurality of features to present at a gaming device for selection by a player.

[0132] Applicants have recognized that, in some embodiments, operators of gaming devices may find it appealing to be able to take advantage of methods and apparatus for determining which features (or combinations of features) to enable for use on one or more gaming devices. For example, some types of operators may

find it appealing to be able to determine which one or more features of a plurality of features are likely to be most appealing to players, to increase revenues of a gaming device, and / or to increase profitability of a gaming device.

[0133] Applicants have recognized that owners and operators of gaming devices may benefit from being able to determine various measures of the performance of a feature. For example, an indication of an amount that an enabled feature has been used on slot machine, or an indication of how much revenue was taken in at a gaming device at which the feature is enabled, may be useful in managing one or more features on a gaming device (*e.g.*, in determining whether to make a feature available for selection by a player on a gaming device). In another example, by tracking information related to use of a gaming device, an increased profitability of the gaming device may be correlated to one or more features enabled at the gaming device.

[0134] Applicants have also recognized that enhancing the operation of a gaming device by enabling and / or disabling the use of one or more particular features (or combinations of features) on the gaming device may serve to distinguish the gaming device, and may provide a more satisfying entertainment experience to players, thus attracting more players to such a gaming device.

[0135] Applicants have also recognized that, in some embodiments, modifying the experience of a player at a gaming device, such as by enabling and / or disabling the use of one or more particular features with the gaming device, may serve to increase the player's use of the gaming device, leading to increased revenues for owners and operators of gaming devices, and may increase the profitability of the gaming device.

[0136] Applicants have also recognized that, in some embodiments, modifying the experience of a player at a gaming device, such as by enabling and / or disabling the use of one or more particular features with the gaming device, may serve to increase the player's use of the gaming device, leading to increased revenues for owners and operators of gaming devices, and may increase the profitability of the gaming device.

[0137] Applicants have further recognized that manufacturers, owners, and operators of gaming devices may benefit from a degree of flexibility in determining which of a plurality features are available for use on a gaming device and / or are represented at a gaming device as available for selection by a player.

5 Applicants have also recognized that manufacturers, owners, and operators of gaming devices may find it appealing to have a feature automatically enabled or disabled on a gaming device and / or to have the feature automatically displayed to a player at a gaming device for selection, in accordance with various predetermined conditions.

10 [0138] Accordingly, the present invention comprises systems and methods for enabling the activation by a player of various features on a gaming device. In accordance with one or more embodiments, a feature is enabled for use on a gaming device, and an indication of the feature is displayed at the gaming device. In some embodiments, a player selection of the feature at the gaming device is also
15 determined, and the feature is activated on the gaming device.

[0139] For example, according to an exemplary embodiment, a player approaches one of the slot machines and inserts his player tracking card. The slot machine then displays a "Features Menu" on a touch screen of the slot machine. The menu includes a list of six different categories of features available to the
20 player on the slot machine: (i) "Team play", (ii) "Bigger Jackpots", (iii) "Longer Game Play", (iv) "Most Popular", (v) "Most Profitable", and (vi) "Virtual Assistant".

[0140] The player touches the "Most Popular" entry listed on the touch screen to select the "Most Popular" category of features. In response, the slot machine
25 displays a list of items in a "Most Popular Menu". The new list includes several entries corresponding to the most popular features that can be used on the player's slot machine, including: (i) "Change symbols on reels of slot machine", (ii) "Reverse payout mode", (iii) "Speed up game play, (iv) "Auto-Play", and (v) "Jackpot Only".

[0141] The player chooses the “Change symbols on reels of slot machine” by touching the displayed menu item on the touch screen, and is able to select new symbols to display on the reels of the slot machine. The player decides to change the cherry symbol to a shamrock for good luck, and presses a virtual “OK” button on the touch screen, when prompted by the slot machine, to confirm the change. After changing the reel symbol, the text “Change Reel Symbol” is displayed in an area labeled “Active Features” on the touch screen. The player then touches a virtual “BACK” button displayed on the touch screen and returns to the “Most Popular Menu” screen to select a different type of feature. Selecting the “Virtual Assistant” feature, the player chooses a cartoon character to guide him through playing games on the slot machine. Afterward, the text “Virtual Assistant” is also displayed in the “Active Features” display area.

[0142] After activating the “Change Reel Symbol” and “Virtual Assistant” features, the player starts playing the slot machine by pressing a “SPIN” button. The player makes several spins. The player then decides to deactivate “Virtual Assistant” feature, and touches the “Virtual Assistant” item displayed in the “Active Features” display area to deactivate the feature.

[0143] Game play may then commence, but the player can go back at any time to revise which features he uses (*e.g.*, by pressing a ‘FEATURES’ button in the corner of the touch screen).

[0144] A feature, as used herein unless expressly indicated otherwise, comprises an enhancement, option, parameter, or mode that may affect how a gaming device operates and / or may affect how a game operates on a gaming device. A feature (*e.g.*, a virtual assistant enhancement, an enhancement allowing a player to make telephone calls at a gaming device) may be contrasted with a game (*e.g.*, a video poker game), which may be affected by a feature (*e.g.*, by allowing for a virtual assistant in a video poker game).

[0145] Features may affect various operations of a game and / or a gaming device, such as the way a game is played, the way play of a game and / or information about a game are displayed, the way outcomes are determined in a

game, and the way information about outcomes are displayed or otherwise communicated to a player. Reference may be made herein to some exemplary features for illustrative purposes; however, the operations of various games and gaming devices with one or more features in use may be dependent on the specific
5 feature or active features, and may not be described in detail herein. Examples of features include, but are not limited to:

- (i) Features that enhance play of a gaming device by modifying a payout mode of the gaming device. A reverse payout mode which is appropriate for enhancing the operation of a gaming device in
10 accordance with one or more embodiments of the present invention is disclosed in U.S. Reissue Application No. 10/222, 523, filed August 16, 2002, entitled "GAMING DEVICE FOR OPERATING IN A REVERSE PAYOUT MODE AND A METHOD OF OPERATING SAME", the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all
15 purposes.
- (ii) Features that affect the operation of a gaming device by allowing for the allocation of wagers by players. For example, an activated feature may allow a player to divide an initial wager into a number of pieces designated by the player, with each wager portion corresponding to a
20 uniquely determined outcome and payout. The size of the payouts may be adjusted by the size of the wager portion, or the probability of a winning outcome appearing could be correspondingly lowered.
- (iii) Features that provide for automated play of one or more gaming devices in which the player is able to pre-pay for a series of reel spins and then
25 watch as the slot machine determines outcomes for each spin without the need for the player to pull a handle or depress a spin button. A feature enhancing the operation of a gaming device to provide for automated play of one or more gaming devices is disclosed in U.S. Application No. 09/879,299, filed June 12, 2001, entitled "SYSTEM
30 AND METHOD FOR AUTOMATED PLAY OF MULTIPLE

GAMING DEVICES”, the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.

- 5 (iv) Features that allow for an offer to be presented to a player at a gaming device. Offers could include discounts at casino restaurants or showrooms, free hotel room nights, and the like. Offers could include a payment to a player in return for an action such as buying a pair of show tickets, providing a source of gambling funds for the player and incremental business for other casino revenue centers (*e.g.* hotel, restaurants, show). A feature enhancing the operation of a gaming device in order to allow for one or more offers to be presented to a player at a gaming device, is disclosed in U.S. Application No. 10/121,243, filed April 11, 2002, entitled “METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR FACILITATING PLAY AT A GAMING DEVICE BY MEANS OF THIRD PARTY OFFERS”, the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.
- 10 15 (v) Features that enhance the operation of a gaming device by allowing the player to eliminate the payouts associated with a set of outcomes in exchange for a reduced cost per play (*e.g.*, at a cost less than a normal wager). For example, the player could elect to buy one or more outcomes of a slot machine in which only the top jackpot was enabled for payment – at a cost significantly lower than the normal cost of a reel spin at that gaming device. A gaming device which can be modified to pay only top jackpot payouts is disclosed in U.S. Application No. _____, [Attorney Docket No. 02-021] filed concurrently herewith, entitled “GAMING DEVICE METHODS AND APPARATUS EMPLOYING MODIFIED PAYOUTS”, the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.
- 20 25 (vi) Features that enhance play of a gaming device by modifying the rate at which outcomes are resolved based on actions of the player. A feature affecting the operation of a gaming device by decreasing the time it takes for the reels of the gaming device to resolve to an outcome when
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player impatience is detected is disclosed in U.S. Application No. _____, [Attorney Docket No. 02-010] filed April 16, 2003, entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR OPTIMIZING THE RATE OF PLAY OF A GAMING DEVICE", the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.

- (vii) Features that enhance the operation of a gaming device by allowing a player to modify at least one element of a gaming device (or of a game). A feature enhancing the operation of a gaming device by allowing a player to modify at least one element of the gaming device in accordance with the present invention is disclosed in U.S. Application No. 10/361,201, filed February 7, 2003, entitled "GAMING DEVICE AND METHOD OF OPERATION THEREOF", the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.
- (viii) Features that enhance the operation of a gaming device by providing a tour or other demonstration of bonus round functionality (*e.g.* instructions, strategies, payout amounts) on the gaming device, such as are disclosed in U.S. Application No. _____, [Attorney Docket No. 02-014] filed April 15, 2003, entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR BONUS ROUND PLAY", the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.
- (ix) Features that affect operation of a game and / or a gaming device, such as by having a virtual assistant (represented by an animated game character appearing on the screen of the gaming device) reveal an alternate outcome in a reeled slot machine game, as are disclosed in U.S. Application No. 10/328,116, filed December 20, 2002, entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR OUTPUTTING OUTCOMES OF A GAMING DEVICE", the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.
- (x) Features providing enhancements of gaming devices such as allowing linked play via gaming and other devices, such as are disclosed in U.S. Application No. 10/254,831, filed September 25, 2002, entitled

“METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR LINKED PLAY GAMING”, the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.

- 5 (xi) Features that affect the operation of a nearby gaming device, such as an embodiment in which the gaming devices surrounding a gaming device that has recently been achieving a lot of high paying outcomes have their own payout levels temporarily increased, such as are disclosed in U.S. Application No. 10/007,874, filed November 12, 2001, entitled “ELECTRONIC AMUSEMENT DEVICE AND METHOD FOR PROPAGATING A PERFORMANCE ADJUSTMENT SIGNAL”, the
10 entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.
- (xii) Features that permit players access to services and / or content at the gaming device (such as a gaming device that allows players to make long distance phone calls provided that they maintain a predetermined rate of play) such as are disclosed in U.S. Application No. 10/322,107,
15 filed December 18, 2002, entitled “FREE LONG DISTANCE CALLS ON SLOT MACHINES”, the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.

[0146] Other appropriate features will be recognized by one of ordinary skill in the art after reading the present application. Note that a variety of different types
20 of features are possible, including, without limitation: (i) features that are only available for one game, (ii) features that are available for a plurality of games, (iii) features that are only available for use on one gaming device, (iv) features that are available for use on a plurality of gaming devices, (v) features that are available for use by one player, and (vi) features that are available for use by a plurality of
25 players. For example, a feature may be available on slot machines and pachinko machines, but not on video poker machines or video blackjack machines. In another example, a feature for a bonus mode may work on all types of machines, but be best suited for card games like video blackjack and video poker.

[0147] According to some embodiments, multiple features may be enabled and
30 / or active simultaneously on a single game or gaming device. For example, a

player may play a video poker machine using a “Group Jackpot” feature and a “Virtual Assistant” feature. According to other embodiments, a first feature may not be compatible with a second feature. For example, it may not be possible for a first feature and a second feature to be active concurrently (*e.g.*, if they provide for mutually exclusive payout modes). Therefore, players may be prevented from using these features simultaneously.

[0148] According to one or more embodiments of the present invention, a feature of a game or of a gaming device may be enabled for use on one or more gaming devices. According to some embodiments of the present invention, enabling a feature for use on a gaming device includes making the feature active on the gaming device (*i.e.* affecting operations of a game and / or of the gaming device in accordance with the feature).

[0149] According to other embodiments of the present invention, if a feature is enabled for use on a gaming device, it may be either active or inactive on the gaming device. In other words, a feature may be made available (*e.g.*, by a server computer) for use on the gaming device, but the feature may or may not actually be in use (*e.g.*, it may or may not be affecting play at the gaming device). For example, the feature may be enabled, but a player may not be using the gaming device. In another example, the feature may be enabled on a gaming device that is being operated by a player, but the player is playing a game that the feature does not affect. In another example, the feature may be enabled on a gaming device that is being operated by a player, but the feature has not been activated by the player, a server computer, or the gaming device to affect play.

[0150] In one or more embodiments of the present invention, enabling a feature for use on a gaming device means that the feature may be offered to a player at the gaming device.

[0151] In some embodiments of the present invention, enabling a feature for use on a gaming device may comprise indicating that the feature is allowed to be used on the gaming device, regardless of whether it is actually ever used. In some embodiments, an indication that a feature is permitted for use on one or more

gaming devices and / or for use with one or more games may be stored in a data structure on a computer-readable medium (*e.g.*, in a gaming device database).

[0152] In some embodiments, enabling a feature on a gaming device comprises providing appropriate instructions (*e.g.*, in computer program code) to the gaming
5 device that the gaming device may execute in order to provide the feature.

[0153] In some embodiments, if a feature is enabled, then a player is able to use the feature when playing a game on a gaming device. For example, a player may play a slot machine game in accordance with a particular feature if the feature is enabled for use on the slot machine.

10 [0154] According to some embodiments, a player may activate and / or deactivate one or more features on a gaming device. In some embodiments, a player may request that one or more features be made active on a gaming device. For example, the player may select an inactive feature (*e.g.*, from a plurality of inactive features displayed to the player), making the feature active. In some
15 embodiments, the player may select the feature to activate or deactivate in response to a displayed indication of the feature, such as a menu list of features available on the gaming device. According to some embodiments, a player may be able to select only features that are enabled for a game or gaming device; in other embodiments, the player may be able to select to activate a feature that is not yet
20 enabled.

[0155] In one or more embodiments of the present invention, the player may receive an offer to enable and / or use one or more features. In some embodiments, a player may be offered the use of one or more features in exchange for a fee or other consideration. In other embodiments, a player may pay a fee or provide
25 other consideration in order to disable or deactivate a feature. Alternatively, a player may be able to activate and / or deactivate a feature on a gaming device free of charge.

[0156] A cost or fee associated with the use of a feature by a player may be based on many factors, including, but not limited to:

- (i) How long a player uses a feature. For example, a player may be charged \$0.05 per minute while he uses an "Automatic Play" feature on a slot machine.
- 5 (ii) How many times a player uses a feature. For example, a player may pay \$0.50 each time he gets a winning outcome using a "Virtual Assistant" feature.
- (iii) One or more benefits (*e.g.*, payouts) received by a player while using a feature. For example, a player may pay a tax of 5% of the value of his prizes won while a feature was active, in exchange for being able to use
10 the feature on a gaming device.

[0157] According to some alternative embodiments, a player may not be able to select what feature(s) are in use for a game or gaming device. For example, the operation of a game or gaming device may be affected by a fixed set of one or more features (*e.g.*, as established by a casino). In another example, once a feature
15 is enabled it is put in use, and a player and / or a gaming device may not be able to deactivate the feature.

[0158] According to other embodiments, a gaming device or a server computer may make a feature active on the gaming device. For example, a casino may activate a gaming device enhancement that provides for the occasional displaying
20 of offers for various products and services to players at a gaming device. In another example, a casino may activate a game enhancement that provides for the displaying of offers for products and services based on certain game events (*e.g.*, upon the awarding of a payout exceeding a predetermined threshold).

[0159] According to one or more embodiments of the present invention, if two
25 or more features are incompatible with one another or otherwise unsuitable for concurrent activation, then a player, a gaming device, or a computer (*e.g.*, a slot server) may be prevented from selecting or otherwise activating one or more of the incompatible features. Information about the compatibility of a feature with one or more other features may be stored in a data structure (*e.g.*, a feature database).

[0160] In one or more embodiments of the present invention, activating a feature on a gaming device includes one or more of, without limitation:

- (i) enabling a player to play a gaming device using the feature;
- (ii) enabling a player to play a gaming device in accordance with the feature;
- (iii) enabling a player to play a game on the gaming device using the feature;
- (iv) enabling a player to play a game in accordance with the feature (*e.g.*, with modified outcomes, with a modified payout table);
- (v) enabling the player to access a service in accordance with the feature (*e.g.*, for a feature that enhances the operation of a gaming device to provide access to a service);
- (vi) enabling the player to receive a product/service in accordance with the feature;
- (vii) enabling the player to access content in accordance with the feature;
- (viii) enabling the player to achieve a modified outcome in accordance with the feature;
- (ix) enabling the player to play the gaming device in accordance with modified outcome probabilities;
- (x) enabling the player to achieve a modified payout amount in accordance with the feature; and
- (xi) enabling the player to customize a game in accordance with the feature.

[0161] The scope of the present invention and embodiments thereof may be understood more fully with reference to the following figures. The leftmost digit(s) of a reference numeral typically identifies the figure in which the reference numeral first appears. It should be noted that the embodiments described with reference to the following figures are presented for illustrative purposes only and are not meant to be limiting in any sense. Further, although particular features of

the present invention may be described with reference to one or more particular embodiments or figures, it should be understood that such features are not limited to usage in the one or more particular embodiments or figures with reference to which they are described.

5 **[0162]** Embodiments of the present invention will first be introduced by means of flowcharts that illustrate some basic processes that may be utilized by an entity practicing the present invention. The system infrastructure will then be described with reference to block diagrams of exemplary systems and devices that may be utilized by an entity practicing the present invention. Exemplary data structures
10 illustrating tables that may be used when practicing some embodiments of the present invention will then be described, along with corresponding flowcharts that illustrate exemplary processes that utilize the exemplary tables.

[0163] Referring now to Fig. 1A, a flowchart illustrates a process 100A that is consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention. The process
15 100A is a method for determining whether a feature should be enabled on a gaming device. The process 100A, and all other processes described herein unless expressly specified otherwise, may be performed by a gaming device, a computer (*e.g.*, a slot server) in communication with the gaming device, a peripheral device in communication with a gaming device, a peripheral device server and /or a
20 combination thereof. Each of these devices is described in detail below. Further, the process 100A, and all other processes described herein unless expressly specified otherwise, may include steps in addition to those expressly depicted in the Figures or described in the specification without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. Similarly, the steps of process 100A and any other
25 process described herein, unless expressly specified otherwise, may be performed in an order other than depicted in the Figures or described in the specification, as appropriate.

[0164] Referring to step 105, a feature is determined. In step 110, the entity determines whether the determined feature should be enabled on at least one
30 gaming device. In some embodiments the determination may comprise

determining whether or not to enable a disabled feature. In other embodiments, the feature may already be enabled on one or more of the at least one gaming device, and the determination may thus comprise determining whether or not to keep the feature enabled (*e.g.*, on those gaming devices on which it is already enabled).

5 **[0165]** In some embodiments, determining whether a feature should be enabled may be based on a condition. Fig. 1D depicts a process, consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention, in which a feature may be indicated to a player based on whether a predetermined condition is satisfied.

10 **[0166]** It will be readily understood that determining whether a feature should be enabled and / or indicated to a player as being available for selection may comprise determining whether the feature should be disabled. In some embodiments, determining whether a feature should be enabled may be based on a measure of performance of the feature. Fig. 1B depicts a process, consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention, in which a measure of
15 performance of a feature is determined and the feature may be disabled based on the measure of performance. Note that Fig. 1B and Fig. 1D illustrate only two possible methods for determining whether to enable (or whether to disable) a feature for use on a gaming device.

20 **[0167]** A rule-based system appropriate for use in accordance with the present invention is disclosed in pending U.S. Patent Application No. 09/603,677, filed June 26, 2000, entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR SELECTING A SUPPLEMENTAL PRODUCT TO OFFER FOR SALE DURING A TRANSACTION", the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference as part of the present disclosure.

25 **[0168]** According to one or more embodiments of the present invention, a feature may be enabled or disabled for use on one or more gaming devices based on one or more rules. In one embodiment, such one or more rules may be associated with, for example, a predetermined condition, as described in Fig. 1D. In another embodiment, such one or more rules may be associated with the player
30 who is operating a gaming device, with the owner of the gaming device, or with a

provider of a feature. In yet another embodiment, the one or more rules may be associated with the gaming device that a player is operating (*e.g.*, the same one or more rules is used to determine whether the feature should be enabled regardless of who the player is or what games may be available for use on the gaming device).

5 **[0169]** In yet another embodiment, the one or more rules may be selected randomly. In one exemplary method of selecting a rule randomly, a random number generated by a random number generator may be determined and a table of rules may be accessed in which each rule corresponds to a respective random number, or range of random numbers that may be generated by a random number
10 generator.

[0170] As is known in the art, a rules-based system may be modified by an adaptive system in order to increase the performance of the rules-based system. An adaptive system which, among other things, may create its own rules and / or modifies rules in accordance with desired performance, and which is appropriate
15 for use in accordance with the present invention is disclosed in pending U.S. Patent Application No. 09/993,228, filed November 14, 2001, entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR DYNAMIC RULE AND/OR OFFER GENERATION", the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference as part of the present disclosure. That application discloses an apparatus and method, which permits and
20 enables rules-based applications (such as a system that provides customers with dynamically-priced upsell offers) to become "self improving" and thus increase performance over time.

[0171] Such an adaptive system can adjust at least some of the rules in accordance with at least one measure of performance of one or more features. For
25 example, an adaptive system can modify rules such that features that have previously proven popular among players of slot machines after they receive a payout of over ten coins (*e.g.*, as indicated by the number of times players have selected the feature within five minutes after receiving the payout) are made the subject of explicit offers to players at the time they receive such a payout. In
30 another example, an adaptive system can modify rules such that features that have

previously tended to generate less revenue on video poker machines during certain times of the day are disabled during those times. In yet another example, an adaptive system can modify rules such that when the theoretical win per minute of a group of slot machines has previously increased more since a first feature was enabled on the slot machines than since a second feature was enabled on the slot machines, the second feature is never enabled while that first feature is enabled. Various other types of measures of performance are described herein, and may be used in accordance with one or more embodiments of the present invention to provide for an adaptive rules-based system for determining whether one or more features should be enabled or disabled.

[0172] By allowing for the adjustment of one or more rules based on one or more measures of performance, some embodiments of the present invention may improve the profitability of gaming devices over time. In some embodiments of the present invention, as discussed herein, an operator of gaming devices may make a feature available to a player for activation on a gaming device (e.g., by displaying a description of the feature in an “Available Features” area of a display) based on usage of the feature. Accordingly, by making improvements to the rules effectively governing which features should be enabled or disabled in various circumstances, based on one or more measures of performance, the operator may reduce the enablement and / or usage of an underperforming or unpopular feature, thereby potentially making available for selection those features that are most profitable for the operator and / or most entertaining to players.

[0173] Some adjustments of the rules may be based on factors other than, or in addition to, one or more measures of performance. As discussed above, a rule for determining whether a feature should be enabled may be selected or generated at random from a table of rules. The effectiveness of the randomly-selected rule may then be evaluated in accordance with one or more measures of performance, further assisting the rule-based system in adapting to improve the performance of the system.

[0174] Referring again to process 100A (Fig. 1A), if the feature should be enabled, in step 115 the feature is enabled on the at least one gaming device. In some embodiments, enabling the feature may comprise storing an indication in a database (*e.g.*, a software flag) and / or transmitting a signal to a gaming device or peripheral device. For example, enabling the feature may include directing a gaming device to display an icon corresponding to the feature in a display area, allowing a player at the gaming device to activate the feature (*e.g.*, by touching a touch screen, by using a pointer device to click on the icon). If the feature is already enabled, in some embodiments enabling the feature may comprise any operations necessary to keep the feature enabled, or to extend a period of time for which the feature is to be enabled.

[0175] Referring to step 120, if the feature should not be enabled, the feature is disabled on the at least one gaming device. It will be understood that in some embodiments disabling a feature may comprise one or more operations to disable a feature that is enabled, or may comprise any operations necessary to keep a feature disabled (*e.g.*, if it is already disabled).

[0176] As depicted in Fig. 1A, in some optional embodiments some steps of the process 100A may be iterative. For example, after step 115 and / or after step 120, operation of the process may return (*e.g.*, after a period of time, in response to a signal) to step 110 for determining whether the feature should be enabled. In this way, an entity may monitor and / or re-evaluate (*e.g.*, periodically, intermittently, or at any time) whether the feature should be enabled on the at least one gaming device. In some embodiments, features may be displayed according to a ranking of the features (*e.g.*, based on a measure of use or popularity). Accordingly, the way in which a feature is displayed may be modified based on updated information (*e.g.*, a feature may be removed from a list of most profitable features if the feature drops in rank).

[0177] Referring now to Fig. 1B, a flowchart illustrates a process 100B that is consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention. The process 100B is a method for disabling a feature based on the performance of an enabled

feature. Referring to step 125, a feature is enabled for use on one or more gaming devices. In some embodiments, the feature may be enabled automatically based on any one or more of various predetermined conditions (*e.g.*, if a player has wagered more than a predetermined amount within ten minutes, or in response to a received
5 signal). In other embodiments, the feature may be enabled manually by or on behalf of an operator of a gaming device (*e.g.*, by a casino representative operating a computer). As discussed herein, enabling a feature for use on a gaming device may include displaying an indication on a gaming device that the feature is available for use (*e.g.*, that the player may activate the feature and play the gaming
10 device in accordance with the feature).

[0178] In step 130, a measure of performance of the feature on the at least one gaming device is determined. In some embodiments, determining a measure of performance of a feature comprises determining a measure of usage of the feature on a gaming device. Fig. 1D depicts a process, consistent with one or more
15 embodiments of the present invention, in which a measure of usage of a feature is determined. Note that Fig. 1D illustrates only one possible method for determining a measure of performance. Other methods will be described herein, and still others may be apparent to those skilled in the art upon reading the present disclosure.

[0179] Referring again to process 100B (Fig. 1B), in step 135 it is determined
20 whether the enabled feature should be disabled based on the measure of performance. If the feature should not be disabled, the process ends; otherwise, in step 140 the feature is disabled and the process ends. In some embodiments, disabling the feature may include removing the feature from a displayed list of available features at a gaming device, or otherwise making the feature unavailable
25 for selection by a player.

[0180] Referring now to Fig. 1C, a flowchart illustrates a process 100C that is consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention. The process 100C is a method for activating a feature on a gaming device. Referring to step 145, an indication of one or more features is displayed to a player. In some
30 embodiments, determining which features to display may include determining a

measure of usage of a feature on a gaming device (*e.g.*, an amount of coin-in, an amount of time that the feature was active on the gaming device, a transaction volume for accepted product/service offers that were provided to players in accordance with the feature). In some embodiments, as discussed herein, an indication may comprise one or more of: an icon, an image, text, or an animated sequence.

[0181] In step 150, an indication of at least one feature selected by the player is received. In some embodiments, the indication may comprise a signal received from the player (*e.g.*, via a touch screen, via a keypad of the gaming device, via the player actuating a button on the gaming device). In step 155, the at least one feature is activated on a gaming device. In some embodiments, as discussed herein, activating a feature may include allowing a modified payout to be provided to the player in accordance with the feature, or allowing the player to customize a game element.

[0182] Referring now to Fig. 1D, a flowchart illustrates a process 100D that is consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention. The process 100D is a method for displaying an indication of a feature on a gaming device. Referring to step 160, a feature is determined. In step 165 it is determined whether a predetermined condition has been satisfied. The predetermined condition, in the context of process 100D, is a condition that must be satisfied in order for an indication of the feature determined in step 160 to be displayed on a gaming device.

[0183] Some of the various types of information on which predetermined conditions may be based, and which may be used to determine whether a predetermined condition is satisfied, are discussed herein and with reference to the accompanying figures. In some embodiments, for example, a predetermined condition will be related to information about the feature whose enablement is being determined. In other embodiments, the predetermined condition may be related to information about one or more other features. For example, a condition

for enabling one feature on a gaming device may be satisfied if another feature has been used at that gaming device for more than a predetermined period of time.

[0184] Note that more than one predetermined condition may be available and / or necessary for satisfaction. In such embodiments, the process 100D may
5 continue to step 170 if any one of a plurality of predetermined conditions is satisfied. Alternatively, a combination of predetermined conditions may each need to be satisfied in order for the process 100D to continue to step 170.

[0185] If it is determined, in step 165, that the predetermined condition has not been satisfied, the process 100D ends. If it is determined, on the other hand, that
10 the condition has been satisfied, then the process 100D continues to step 170, in which an indication of the feature is displayed on a gaming device. In step 175, it is determined whether a player has selected the feature (*e.g.*, has requested to make the feature active on the gaming device). In some embodiments, as described herein, the player may indicate her selection of the feature by actuating an
15 appropriate button on the gaming device, or by using a pointer device to click on an appropriate icon displayed at the gaming device.

[0186] In step 180, an outcome is determined in accordance with the selected feature. As discussed herein, some features provided for enhancements or modifications to the way in which an outcome is determined during play of a
20 gaming device. In step 185 a payout is determined based on the determined outcome. In step 190, it is determined whether the feature has been deactivated by the player. In some embodiments, a player may deactivate a feature (*e.g.*, stop using the feature) by touching an indication of the active feature on a touch screen of a gaming device. Other ways in which a feature may be deactivated and / or
25 disabled are described herein. If the feature has been deactivated in step 190, the process 100D ends. Otherwise, the process continues in step 180 with the determination of another outcome in accordance with the feature.

[0187]

[0188] *e.g.e.g.* Applicants have recognized that the accumulation, storing, and / or analysis of various types of information may be helpful in the management of features on gaming devices. Many types of information are discussed herein. Some types of information may be helpful, for example, in determining whether a
5 feature should be enabled or disabled. Some types of information may be useful, for example, in determining a payment due to a provider of a feature. Some types of information, for example, may be useful for both determining whether a feature should be enabled or disabled and for determining a payment due to a provider of a feature. Some types of information may be useful in establishing rules in a rules-
10 based system, and / or for establishing predetermined conditions.

[0189] Examples of types of information that may be helpful in managing features for use on one or more gaming devices and / or with one or more games include, but are not limited to:

- (i) information about performance of one or more features;
- 15 (ii) information about usage of one or more features;
- (iii) information about usage of one or more gaming devices;
- (iv) information about profitability of one or more features;
- (v) information about profitability of one or more gaming devices;
- (vi) information about players, including information about the gambling
20 activity of players;
- (vii) information about offers provided to players in accordance with one or more features;
- (viii) indications (*e.g.*, signals) from various parties;
- (ix) information about a casino or other establishment;
- 25 (x) information about one or more games;
- (xi) information about one or more providers of features;
- (xii) time-related conditions;

(xiii) authorization codes; and

(xiv) random numbers.

[0190] Other appropriate categories or types of information will be recognized by one of ordinary skill in the art after reading the present application. The types of information described herein are categorized for illustrative purposes only.

Note that some information consistent with one or more embodiments of the present invention may reasonably be considered as related to or falling within two, more than two, or none of the categories of information described herein. Also, although information may be described as being related to a single entity (*e.g.*, a player, a gaming device) for illustrative purposes only, one skilled in the art will understand that similar information related to a plurality of such entities (*e.g.*, an aggregate revenue generated on all gaming devices, an average per gaming device) may also be used in accordance with one or more embodiments of the present invention.

[0191] A measure of performance, as used herein unless expressly indicated otherwise, may refer to a measure of performance of a feature and / or of a gaming device, and may include, but is not limited to, (i) one or more measures of usage of features and / or gaming devices; (ii) one or more measures of profitability of features and / or gaming devices, and / or (iii) variances in any such measures that may be correlated to the use or non-use of one or more features on a gaming device.

[0192] In some embodiments, a measure of performance may comprise an indication of a change in a particular measure (*e.g.*, of usage, of profitability) related to a feature (or to a gaming device). For example, a measure of performance of a feature may be the determined increase in the number of players using a gaming device at which the feature is enabled, or an increase in the average amount that players wager at a gaming device on which the feature is enabled. In another example, an increase in the theoretical win per minute of a gaming device, during a period that started when a feature was enabled at the gaming device, may be a useful indicator in determining whether the feature should be enabled or

disabled on the gaming device, as well as for determining whether the feature should be enabled or disabled on other gaming devices. For example, a condition may be established that if the increase is greater than a predetermined value, then the feature should be automatically enabled on other gaming devices of the same
5 type.

[0193] In another example, some features may enhance operation of gaming devices or of games in order to promote the fulfillment of certain types of goals, such as teaching players how to use a certain type of gaming device, or encouraging players to play gaming devices more quickly. Measures of
10 performance of such features may thus include information related to the desired goals (*e.g.*, an average wager size, an average rate of play).

[0194] Some examples of information that may facilitate the management of various features for use on one or more gaming devices (*e.g.*, in determining whether a feature should be made available on a gaming device for selection by a
15 player, in determining how a feature should be displayed to a player at a gaming device) include, but are not limited to:

- (i) An amount of revenue generated while a feature is in use;
- (ii) An average amount wagered by a player (or players) while a feature is in use;
- 20 (iii) An average rate of play when a player is using a feature;
- (iv) An average session theoretical win when a player is using a feature;
- (v) A number of customer service complaints relating to a feature;
- (vi) An average duration of a gaming session when a player is using a feature;
- 25 (vii) A number of machines at which a feature is active;
- (viii) A percentage amount of machines at which a feature is active;
- (ix) A number of times that a feature is used (*e.g.*, within a period of time);
- (x) An average number of times that a feature is used by a player;

- (xi) A period of time that a feature is in use (*e.g.*, in minutes or hours);
- (xii) A period of time that one or more gaming devices are in use;
- (xiii) A percentage amount of all gaming devices that are gaming devices on which a feature is in use;
- 5 (xiv) Which game(s) a feature is used with;
- (xv) Which gaming device(s) (*e.g.*, types of gaming devices) a feature is used with;
- (xvi) What types of players use a feature (*e.g.*, new players, old players, “high rollers”);
- 10 (xvii) Information about features that are used concurrently with at least one other feature;
- (xviii) A time of day when a feature is used (*e.g.*, during peak hours, during the middle of the night);
- (xix) A profit of a gaming device while a feature was in use;
- 15 (xx) An amount of revenue resulting from use of the feature;
- (xxi) A profit from use of the feature (*e.g.*, profit earned from accepted offers);
- (xxii) A cost resulting from use of a feature (*e.g.*, a cost associated with providing a service in accordance with a feature);
- 20 (xxiii) An increase (or decrease) in payout percentage (*e.g.*, at one or more gaming devices);
- (xxiv) An increase (or decrease) in theoretical win (*e.g.*, at one or more gaming devices)
- (xxv) An increase (or decrease) in an amount of revenue generated at an ancillary merchant, establishment or enterprise related to an offer (*e.g.*,
25 revenue generated at a restaurant sponsoring a dinner offer that is provided in accordance with a feature)

- (xxvi) A value of a benefit (*e.g.*, money) paid to a player (*e.g.*, money paid to a player by sponsors, such as if a player performs one or more value-added activities;
- 5 (xxvii) An amount of revenue generated at one or more gaming devices near a gaming device at which a feature is used (*e.g.*, if a features makes play so entertaining that it makes move to one area of the casino);
- (xxviii) A number or value of comps received by a player (*e.g.*, playing a feature-enabled gaming device);
- (xxix) A percentage of funds stored with a server (*e.g.*, due to interest);
- 10 (xxx) A player's rate of play while a feature is in use;
- (xxxi) An increase or decrease in a player's rate of play (*e.g.*, comparing play with a feature enabled and play without the feature enabled);
- (xxxii) A number of offers accepted or rejected by a player (*e.g.*, for a feature that makes offers to a player);
- 15 (xxxiii) A percentage of offers that are rejected / that are accepted;
- (xxxiv) An increase or decrease in the amount of coin-in by a player (*e.g.*, comparing play with a feature enabled and play without the feature enabled);
- (xxxv) An increase or decrease in the (average) session length of a player (*e.g.*,
20 comparing feature-enabled play and non-enhanced play);
- (xxxvi) An increase or decrease in the percentage of time a player spends gambling during a casino visit (*e.g.*, comparing feature-enabled play and non-enhanced play);
- (xxxvii) Whether a player signs up for a player tracking card;
- 25 (xxxviii) A number of players who sign up for player tracking cards;
- (xxxix) How often a feature is used (*e.g.*, whether the number of times a feature is used on a gaming device (or gaming devices) each day is greater than a predetermined number of times);

- (xl) A period of time for which a feature is used by a player (or players) (*e.g.*, for determining whether the period of time that a player used a feature was less than five minutes, or whether the average period of time that players use a feature is less than two hours);
- 5 (xli) What type(s) of games the feature is used with (*e.g.*, for determining whether the feature is used with games on bonus round slot machines, or with video poker machines);
- (xlii) What type(s) of gaming devices the feature is used with (*e.g.*, for determining whether the feature is used on machines in the smoking
10 section);
- (xliii) What type(s) of players use the feature (*e.g.*, for determining whether a predetermined minimum number of novice players have used the feature); and
- (xliv) A number of different players who have used the feature (*e.g.*, for
15 determining whether a predetermined minimum number of unique players have used the feature).

[0195] Other types of information useful in managing features will be recognized by one of ordinary skill in the art after reading the present application.

- [0196] Although measures related to usage of a feature (*e.g.*, information
20 related to behavior of players at a gaming device while a feature was actually active or in use) are discussed frequently herein as useful measures of performance of a feature, it will be understood that a useful measure of performance may be related to activity at a gaming device while a feature is merely enabled for use on the gaming device, regardless of whether the feature is ever used or activated by a
25 player. For example, a player may be attracted to a gaming device at which a particular feature is enabled for use (and may as a result spend longer playing the gaming device), simply because the particular feature is available to the player, or may be offered to or activated for the player, even if the player does not use the feature most of the time or even at all. In other words, some players may choose to
30 play a gaming device at which particular features are enabled over another gaming

device lacking the features, even if the player does not take advantage of the features' enhancements.

[0197] Referring now to Fig. 2A, a block diagram of a system 200 according to at least one embodiment of the present invention includes a computer 210 (*e.g.*, a slot server of a casino) that is in communication, via a communications network 220, with one or more gaming devices 230 (*e.g.*, slot machines, video poker machines). The computer 210 may communicate with the devices 230 directly or indirectly, via a wired or wireless medium such as the Internet, LAN, WAN or Ethernet, Token Ring, or via any appropriate communications means or combination of communications means. Each of the devices 230 may comprise computers, such as those based on the INTEL® PENTIUM® processor, that are adapted to communicate with the computer 210. Any number and type of devices 230 may be in communication with the computer 210.

[0198] Communication between the devices 230 and the computer 210, and among the devices 230, may be direct or indirect, such as over the Internet through a Web site maintained by computer 210 on a remote server or over an on-line data network including commercial on-line service providers, bulletin board systems and the like. In yet other embodiments, the devices 230 may communicate with one another and / or computer 210 over RF, cable TV, satellite links and the like.

[0199] Some, but not all, possible communication networks that may comprise network 220 or be otherwise part of system 200 include: a local area network (LAN), a wide area network (WAN), the Internet, a telephone line, a cable line, a radio channel, an optical communications line, a satellite communications link. Possible communications protocols that may be part of system 200 include: Ethernet (or IEEE 802.3), SAP, ATP, Bluetooth™, and TCP/IP. Communication may be encrypted to ensure privacy and prevent fraud in any of a variety of ways well known in the art.

[0200] Those skilled in the art will understand that devices in communication with each other need not be continually transmitting to each other. On the contrary, such devices need only transmit to each other as necessary, and may

actually refrain from exchanging data most of the time. For example, a device in communication with another device via the Internet may not transmit data to the other device for weeks at a time.

[0201] In some embodiments, the computer 210 may not be necessary and / or preferred. For example, the present invention may, in one or more embodiments, be practiced on a stand-alone gaming device 230 and / or a gaming device 230 in communication only with one or more other gaming devices 230. In such an embodiment, any functions described as performed by the computer 210 or data described as stored on the computer 210 may instead be performed by or stored on one or more gaming devices 230.

[0202] Referring now to Fig. 2B, a block diagram of another system 250 according to at least one embodiment of the present invention includes a computer 210 (*e.g.*, a slot server of a casino) that is in communication, via a communications network 220, with one or more gaming devices 230 (*e.g.*, slot machines, video poker machines). A difference between system 200 (Fig. 2A) and system 250 (Fig. 2B) is that in system 250 at least one gaming device 230 is also in communication with one or more peripheral devices 240. A peripheral device 240 may, in turn, be in communication with a peripheral device server 245 and, in some embodiments, with computer 210. In one or more embodiments the peripheral device server 245 may be in communication with one or more gaming devices 240 and / or computer 210.

[0203] The computer 210 may communicate with the devices 230 and devices 240 directly or indirectly, via a wired or wireless medium such as the Internet, LAN, WAN or Ethernet, Token Ring, or via any appropriate communications means or combination of communications means. For example, the computer 210 may communicate directly with one of the gaming devices 230 (*e.g.*, via a LAN) and indirectly (*e.g.*, via a gaming device 230) with a peripheral device 240. In another example, the computer 210 may communicate with one of the gaming devices 230 via a LAN and with another of the gaming devices 230 via the Internet

(e.g., if the particular gaming device comprises a personal computer in communication with an online casino).

[0204] Each of the devices 230 and the devices 240 may comprise computers, such as those based on the INTEL® PENTIUM® processor, that are adapted to communicate with the computer 210. Further, each of the devices 230 may comprise a gaming device such as a mechanical or electronic slot machine, a video poker machine, a video blackjack machine, a video keno machine, a pachinko machine, a video roulette machine, and / or a lottery terminal. Further yet, each of the devices 240 may comprise an external or internal module associated with one or more of the gaming devices 230 that is capable of communicating with one or more of the gaming devices 230 and of directing the one or more gaming devices 230 to perform one or more functions. Any number of devices 230 may be in communication with the computer 210. Any number and type of peripheral devices 240 may be in communication with a gaming device 230, peripheral device server 245 and computer 210.

[0205] Communication between the devices 230 and the computer 210, between the devices 230 and devices 240, between peripheral device server 245 and the devices 240 and / or the devices 230, between the peripheral device server 245 and computer 210, among the devices 230, and among the devices 240 may be direct or indirect, such as over the Internet through a Web site maintained by computer 210 on a remote server or over an on-line data network including commercial on-line service providers, bulletin board systems and the like. In yet other embodiments, any and all of the devices of system 250 (*i.e.*, the devices 230, the devices 240, the computer 210, and the peripheral device server 245) may communicate with one another over RF, cable TV, satellite links and the like.

[0206] Some, but not all, possible communication networks that may comprise network 220 or otherwise be part of system 250 include: a local area network (LAN), a wide area network (WAN), the Internet, a telephone line, a cable line, a radio channel, an optical communications line, a satellite communications link. Possible communications protocols that may be part of system 250 include:

Ethernet (or IEEE 802.3), SAP, ATP, Bluetooth™, and TCP/IP. Communication may be encrypted to ensure privacy and prevent fraud in any of a variety of ways well known in the art.

- [0207]** In some embodiments, the computer 210 may not be necessary and / or preferred. For example, the present invention may, in one or more embodiments, be practiced on a stand-alone gaming device 230, one or more gaming devices in communication with one or more peripheral devices 240, one or more gaming devices in communication with peripheral device server 245, one or more peripheral devices 240 in communication with peripheral device server 245, and / or a gaming device 230 in communication only with one or more other gaming devices 230. In such an embodiment, any functions described as performed by the computer 210 or data described as stored in a memory of the computer 210 may instead be performed by or stored on one or more gaming devices 230, one or more peripheral devices 240, and / or peripheral device server 245.
- [0208]** Similarly, peripheral device server 245 may not be desired and / or needed in some embodiments of the present invention. In embodiments that do not involve peripheral device server 245, any or all of the functions described herein as being performed by peripheral device server 245 may instead be performed by computer 210, one or more gaming devices 230, one or more peripheral devices 240, or a combination thereof. Similarly, in embodiments that do not involve peripheral device server 245 any data described herein as being stored in a memory of peripheral device server 245 may instead be stored in a memory of computer 210, one or more gaming devices 230, one or more peripheral devices 240, or a combination thereof.
- [0209]** Any or all of the gaming devices 230 may, respectively, include or be in communication with a peripheral device 240. A peripheral device 240 may be a device that receives information from (and / or transmits information to) one or more gaming devices 230. For example, a peripheral device 240 may be operable to receive information about games being played on a gaming device 230, such as the initiation of a game and / or a random number that has been generated for a

game, and / or may be operable to receive information about features enabled or in use on the gaming device 230.

[0210] In one or more embodiments, one or more such peripheral devices 240 may be in communication with a peripheral device server 245. This allows the peripheral device server 245 to receive information regarding a plurality of games being played on a plurality of gaming devices 230. The peripheral device server 245, in turn, may be in communication with the computer 210. It should be understood that any functions described herein as performed by a peripheral device 240 may also or instead be performed by the peripheral device server 245. Similarly, any data described herein as being stored on or accessed by a peripheral device 240 may also or instead be stored on or accessed by the peripheral device server 245.

[0211] A peripheral device 240 may be operable to access a database (*e.g.*, of peripheral device server 245) to provide benefits (*e.g.*, cashless gaming receipts) based on, for example, an active feature of a gaming device 230. A peripheral device 240 may also be operable to access a database (*e.g.*, a feature database, as described in more detail below) to determine a product/services offer to output on a gaming device (*e.g.*, in accordance with an active feature).

[0212] The peripheral device server 245 may also monitor player gambling history over time by associating gambling behavior with player identifiers, such as player tracking card numbers. For example, in embodiments wherein a player selects which feature is to be active, the peripheral device server 245 may track which feature the player has previously selected and subsequently use that information to present other offers for features to the player and / or to output other information to the player. Further, information about the player obtained or accessed by peripheral device server 245 may be analyzed, *e.g.*, to identify those players that a particular gaming machine owner, operator, or manufacturer finds most desirable. Based upon desired objectives, the peripheral device server 245 may direct the appropriate peripheral device 240 to issue customized messages to specific players that are relevant to their gambling behaviors.

[0213] Information received by a peripheral device 240 from a gaming device 230 may include gambling data such as number of games initiated per unit of time, outcomes displayed for games initiated, payouts corresponding to outcomes displayed, a credit meter balance of the gaming device, and / or data associated with the player currently playing the gaming device 230.

[0214] The functions described herein as being performed by a peripheral device server 245 and / or a peripheral device 240 may, in one or more embodiments, be performed by the computer 210 (in lieu of or in conjunction with being performed by a peripheral device server 245 and / or a peripheral device 240). Such functions may be performed by computer 210 in either system 200 (Fig. 2A) or system 250 (Fig. 2B).

[0215] In one or more embodiments, a peripheral device 240 may be useful for implementing the embodiments of the present invention into the operation of a conventional gaming device. For example, in order to avoid or minimize the necessity of modifying or replacing a program already stored in a memory of a conventional gaming device, an external or internal module that comprises a peripheral device 240 may be inserted in or associated with the gaming device.

[0216] Thus, for example, a peripheral device 240 may be utilized to monitor play of the gaming device and enhance or otherwise affect play in accordance with one or more active features. In such embodiments the gaming device 230 with which the peripheral device 240 is in communication with may continue to operate conventionally (*e.g.*, as if features were not active). In such embodiments, for example, if the feature includes the offering of products or services to players, or the displaying of video content, operation of the gaming device 230 may continue conventionally. The peripheral device 240, however, may output one or more offers. The peripheral device 240 may also output messages to the player (*e.g.*, such as "Would you like to play in Reverse Payout Mode?"). The peripheral device 240 may also provide benefits to a player (*e.g.*, coins, tokens, electronic credits, paper receipts exchangeable for cash, services, and / or merchandise).

[0217] Accordingly, a peripheral device 240 may include (i) a communications port (*e.g.*, for communicating with one or more gaming devices 230, peripheral device server 245, another peripheral device 240, and / or computer 210); (ii) a display (*e.g.*, for displaying messages and / or outcomes), (iii) another output means (*e.g.*, a speaker, light, or motion device to communicate with a player), and / or (iv) a benefit providing means (*e.g.*, a printer and paper dispensing means, a credit meter, and / or a hopper and hopper controller).

[0218] In one or more embodiments, the peripheral device may not output outcomes and / or messages to a player but may instead direct the processor of a gaming device to perform such functions. For example, a program stored in a memory of peripheral device 240 may cause a processor of a gaming device to perform certain functions. For example, a program stored in a memory of peripheral device 240 may cause a processor of a gaming device to provide for enhanced play of the gaming device in accordance with one or more enabled features, by modifying how the gaming device outputs an outcome, determines an outcome, outputs a message, provides a benefit, and / or displays game information.

[0219] Referring now to FIG. 3, illustrated therein is a block diagram of an embodiment 300 of a gaming device. The gaming device 300 may be implemented as a system controller, a dedicated hardware circuit, an appropriately programmed general-purpose computer, or any other equivalent electronic, mechanical or electro-mechanical device. The gaming device 300 may comprise, for example, a slot machine, a video poker terminal, a video blackjack terminal, a video keno terminal, a video lottery terminal, a pachinko machine or a table-top game. In various embodiments, a gaming device may comprise, for example, a personal computer (*e.g.*, which communicates with an online casino Web site), a telephone (*e.g.*, to communicate with an automated sports book that provides gaming services), or a portable handheld gaming device (*e.g.*, a personal digital assistant or NINTENDO® GAMEBOY®). The gaming device 300 may comprise any or all of the gaming devices 230 of system 200 (Fig. 2A) or system 250 (Fig. 2B). In some embodiments, a user device such as a PDA or cell phone may be

used in place of, or in addition to, some or all of the gaming device 300 components depicted in FIG. 3. Further, a gaming device may comprise a personal computer or other device operable to communicate with an online casino and facilitate game play at the online casino. In one or more embodiments, the gaming device 300 may comprise a computing device operable to execute software that simulates play of a reeled slot machine game, video poker game, video blackjack game, video keno game, video roulette game, or lottery game.

[0220] The gaming device 300 comprises a processor 305, such as one or more INTEL® PENTIUM® processors. The processor 305 is in communication with a memory 310 and a communications port 370 (*e.g.*, for communicating with one or more other devices). The memory 310 may comprise an appropriate combination of magnetic, optical and/or semiconductor memory, and may include, for example, Random Access Memory (RAM), Read-Only Memory (ROM), a compact disc and/or a hard disk. The memory 310 may comprise or include any type of computer-readable medium. The processor 305 and the memory 310 may each be, for example: (i) located entirely within a single computer or other device; or (ii) connected to each other by a remote communication medium, such as a serial port cable, telephone line or radio frequency transceiver. In one embodiment, the gaming device 300 may comprise one or more devices that are connected to a remote server computer for maintaining databases.

[0221] The memory 310 stores a program 315 for controlling the processor 305. The processor 305 performs instructions of the program 315, and thereby operates in accordance with the present invention, and particularly in accordance with the methods described in detail herein. The program 315 may be stored in a compressed, uncompiled and/or encrypted format. The program 315 furthermore includes program elements that may be necessary, such as an operating system, a database management system and “device drivers” for allowing the processor 305 to interface with computer peripheral devices. Appropriate program elements are known to those skilled in the art, and need not be described in detail herein.

[0222] The term “computer-readable medium” as used herein refers to any medium that participates in providing instructions to processor 305 (or any other processor of a device described herein) for execution. Such a medium may take many forms, including but not limited to, non-volatile media, volatile media, and transmission media. Non-volatile media include, for example, optical or magnetic disks, such as memory 310. Volatile media include dynamic random access memory (DRAM), which typically constitutes the main memory. Transmission media include coaxial cables, copper wire and fiber optics, including the wires that comprise a system bus coupled to the processor 305. Transmission media can also take the form of acoustic or light waves, such as those generated during radio frequency (RF) and infrared (IR) data communications. Common forms of computer-readable media include, for example, a floppy disk, a flexible disk, hard disk, magnetic tape, any other magnetic medium, a CD-ROM, DVD, any other optical medium, punch cards, paper tape, any other physical medium with patterns of holes, a RAM, a PROM, an EPROM, a FLASH-EEPROM, any other memory chip or cartridge, a carrier wave as described hereinafter, or any other medium from which a computer can read.

[0223] Various forms of computer readable media may be involved in carrying one or more sequences of one or more instructions to processor 305 (or any other processor of a device described herein) for execution. For example, the instructions may initially be borne on a magnetic disk of a remote computer. The remote computer can load the instructions into its dynamic memory and send the instructions over a telephone line using a modem. A modem local to a gaming device 300 (or, *e.g.*, a computer 210) can receive the data on the telephone line and use an infrared transmitter to convert the data to an infrared signal. An infrared detector can receive the data carried in the infrared signal and place the data on a system bus for processor 305. The system bus carries the data to main memory, from which processor 200 retrieves and executes the instructions. The instructions received by main memory may optionally be stored in memory 310 either before or after execution by processor 305. In addition, instructions may be received via communication port 370 as electrical, electromagnetic or optical signals, which are

exemplary forms of carrier waves that carry data streams representing various types of information. Thus, the gaming device 300 may obtain instructions in the form of a carrier wave.

[0224] According to an embodiment of the present invention, the instructions
5 of the program 315 may be read into a main memory from another computer-readable medium, such from a ROM to RAM. Execution of sequences of the instructions in program 315 causes processor 305 to perform the process steps described herein. In alternate embodiments, hard-wired circuitry may be used in place of, or in combination with, software instructions for implementation of the
10 processes of the present invention. Thus, embodiments of the present invention are not limited to any specific combination of hardware and software. As discussed with respect to system 250 of Fig. 2B, execution of sequences of the instructions in a program of a peripheral device 240 in communication with gaming device 300 may also cause processor 305 to perform some of the process steps described
15 herein.

[0225] The memory 310 also stores a plurality of databases, including a probability database 320, and a payout database 325. Note, although these databases are described as being stored in a gaming device, in other embodiments of the present invention some or all of these databases may be partially or wholly
20 stored in another device, such as one or more of the peripheral devices 240, the peripheral device server 245 and / or the computer 210. Further, some or all of the data described as being stored in the databases 320 – 335 may be partially or wholly stored (in addition to or in lieu of being stored in the memory 310 of the gaming device 300) in a memory of one or more other devices, such as one or
25 more of the peripheral devices 240, another gaming device 230, the peripheral device server 245 and / or the computer 210.

[0226] The databases 220 and 225 are depicted for illustrative purposes only, and need not be described in detail herein.

[0227] The processor 305 is also operable to communicate with a random
30 number generator 345, which may be a component of gaming device 300. The

random number generator, in accordance with at least one embodiment of the present invention, may generate data representing random or pseudo-random values (referred to as “random numbers” herein). The random number generator may generate a random number every predetermined unit of time (*e.g.*, every
5 second) or in response to an initiation of a game on the gaming device. In the former embodiment, the generated random numbers may be used as they are generated (*e.g.*, the random number generated at substantially the time of game initiation is used for that game) and / or stored for future use.

[0228] A random number generator, as used herein, may be embodied as a
10 processor separate from but working in cooperation with processor 305. Alternatively, random number generator 345 may be embodied as an algorithm, program component, or software stored in the memory of gaming device 300 and used to generate a random number.

[0229] Note that, although the generation or obtainment of a random number is
15 described herein as involving a random number generator of a gaming device, other methods of determining a random number may be employed. For example, a gaming device owner or operator may obtain sets of random numbers that have been generated by another entity. HOTBITS™, for example, is a service that provides random numbers that have been generated by timing successive pairs of
20 radioactive decays detected by a Geiger-Muller tube interfaced to a computer. A blower mechanism that uses physical balls with numbers thereon may be used to determine a random number by randomly selecting one of the balls and determining the number thereof.

[0230] The processor 305 is also operable to communicate with a benefit
25 output device 350, which may be a component of gaming device 300. The benefit output device 350 may comprise one or more devices for outputting a benefit to a player of the gaming device 300. For example, in one embodiment the gaming device 300 may provide coins and / or tokens as a benefit. In such an embodiment the benefit output device 350 may comprise a hopper and hopper controller, for
30 dispensing coins and / or tokens into a coin tray of the gaming device 300. In

another example, the gaming device 300 may provide a receipt or other document on which there is printed an indication of a benefit (*e.g.*, a cashless gaming receipt that has printed thereon a monetary value, which is redeemable for cash in the amount of the monetary value). In such an embodiment the benefit output device
5 350 may comprise a printing and document dispensing mechanism. In yet another example, the gaming device 300 may provide electronic credits as a benefit (which, *e.g.*, may be subsequently converted to coins and / or tokens and dispensed from a hopper into a coin tray). In such an embodiment the benefit output device 350 may comprise a credit meter balance and / or a processor that manages the
10 amount of electronic credits that is indicated on a display of a credit meter balance. The processor may be the processor 305 or another processor. In yet another example, the gaming device 300 may credit a monetary amount to a financial account associated with a player as a benefit provided to a player. The financial account may be, for example, a credit card account, a debit account, a charge
15 account, a checking account, or a casino account. In such an embodiment the benefit output device may comprise a device for communicating with a server on which the financial account is maintained.

[0231] Note that, in one or more embodiments, the gaming device 300 may include more than one benefit output device 350 even though only one benefit
20 output device is illustrated in Fig. 3. For example, the gaming device 300 may include both a hopper and hopper controller combination and a credit meter balance. Such a gaming device may be operable to provide more than one type of benefit to a player of the gaming device. A single benefit output device 350 may be operable to output more than one type of benefit. For example, a benefit output
25 device 350 may be operable to increase the balance of credits in a credit meter and communicate with a remote device in order to increase the balance of a financial account associated with a player.

[0232] The processor 305 is also operable to communicate with a display device 355, which may be a component of gaming device 300. The display device
30 355 may comprise, for example, one or more display screens or areas for outputting information related to game play on the gaming device, such as a

cathode ray tube (CRT) monitor, liquid crystal display (LCD) screen, or light emitting diode (LED) screen.

[0233] In one or more embodiments, a gaming device may comprise more than one display device. For example, a gaming device may comprise an LCD display
5 for displaying electronic reels and a display area that displays rotating mechanical reels.

[0234] The processor 305 may also be in communication with one or more other devices besides the display device 355, for outputting information (*e.g.*, to a player or another device). Such other one or more output devices may also be
10 components of gaming device 300. Such other one or more output devices may comprise, for example, an audio speaker (*e.g.*, for outputting an offer for a feature or information related thereto, in addition to or in lieu of such information being output via a display device 355), an infra-red transmitter, a radio transmitter, an electric motor, a printer (*e.g.*, such as for printing cashless gaming vouchers), a
15 coupon or product dispenser, an infra-red port (*e.g.*, for communicating with a second gaming device or a portable device of a player), a Braille computer monitor, and a coin or bill dispenser. For gaming devices, common output devices include, but are not limited to, a cathode ray tube (CRT) monitor on a video poker machine, a bell on a gaming device (*e.g.*, rings when a player wins), an LED
20 display of a player's credit balance on a gaming device, and an LCD display of a personal digital assistant (PDA).

[0235] The display device 355 may comprise, for example, one or more display areas. For example, one of the display areas may display outcomes of games played on the gaming device (*e.g.*, electronic reels of a gaming device).
25 Another of the display areas may display rules for playing a game of the gaming device. Yet another of the display areas may display the benefits obtainable by playing a game of the gaming device (*e.g.*, in the form of a payout table). In one or more embodiments, the gaming device 300 may include more than one display device, one or more other output devices, or a combination thereof (*e.g.*, two
30 display devices and two audio speakers).

[0236] The processor 305 is also in communication with an input device 365, which is a device that is capable of receiving an input (*e.g.*, from a player or another device) and which may be a component of gaming device 300. An input device may communicate with or be part of another device (*e.g.* a server, a gaming
5 device, etc.). Some examples of input devices include: a bar-code scanner, a magnetic stripe reader, a computer keyboard or keypad, a button, a handle, a keypad, a touch-screen, a microphone, an infrared sensor, a voice recognition module, a coin or bill acceptor, a sonic ranger, a computer port, a video camera, a motion detector, a digital camera, a network card, a universal serial bus (USB)
10 port, a GPS receiver, a radio frequency identification (RFID) receiver, an RF receiver, a thermometer, a pressure sensor, an infrared port (*e.g.*, for receiving communications from with a second gaming device or a another device such as a smart card or PDA of a player), and a weight scale. For gaming devices, common input devices include a button or touch screen on a video poker machine, a lever or
15 handle connected to the gaming device, a magnetic stripe reader to read a player tracking card inserted into a gaming device, a touch screen for input of player selections during game play, and a coin and bill acceptor.

[0237] The processor 305 is also in communication with a payment system 375, which may be a component of gaming device 300. The payment system 375
20 is a device capable of accepting payment from a player (*e.g.*, a bet or initiation of a balance) and / or providing payment to a player (*e.g.*, a payout). Payment is not limited to money, but may also include other types of consideration, including products, services, and alternate currencies.

[0238] Exemplary methods of accepting payment by the payment system 375
25 include (i) receiving hard currency (*i.e.*, coins or bills), and accordingly the payment system 375 may comprise a coin or bill acceptor; (ii) receiving an alternate currency (*e.g.*, a paper cashless gaming voucher, a coupon, a non-negotiable token), and accordingly the payment system 375 may comprise a bar code reader or other sensing means; (iii) receiving a payment identifier (*e.g.*, a
30 credit card number, a debit card number, a player tracking card number) and

debiting the account identified by the payment identifier; and (iv) determining that a player has performed a value-added activity.

[0239] In one embodiment, a player may operate a plurality of gaming devices. For example, a player may simultaneously play two side-by-side gaming devices, a
5 player may play one gaming device (*e.g.* a gaming device) and then continue his gaming session at another gaming device (*e.g.* a video poker machine), and a player may remotely operate a gaming device, possibly by using a telephone, PDA or other device (i) to transmit commands (directly or indirectly) to the gaming device, such as wager amounts and commands to select certain cards; and / or (ii)
10 to receive output (directly or indirectly) from the gaming device.

[0240] In one embodiment, a gaming device may allow a player to play a game of skill rather than a game of chance. Such an embodiment may be more appealing to certain players or may be permitted in areas where it is illegal to gamble on games of chance.

15 [0241] Referring now to Fig. 4, illustrated therein is a block diagram of an embodiment 400 of computer 210 (Fig. 2A and Fig. 2B). The computer 400 may be implemented as a system controller, a dedicated hardware circuit, an appropriately programmed general-purpose computer, or any other equivalent electronic, mechanical or electro-mechanical device. The computer 400 may
20 comprise, for example, a server computer operable to communicate with one or more client devices, such as gaming devices 230. The computer 400 is operative to manage the system 200 and the system 250 and execute the methods of the present invention.

[0242] In operation, the computer 400 may function under the control of a
25 casino, a merchant, or other entity that may also control use of the gaming devices 230, peripheral devices 240, and / or peripheral device server 245. For example, the computer 400 may be a slot server in a casino. In some embodiments, the computer 400 and slot server may be different devices. In some embodiments, the computer 400 may comprise more than one computer operating together. In some

embodiments, the computer 400 and peripheral device server 245 may be the same device.

[0243] The computer 400 comprises a processor 405, such as one or more INTEL® PENTIUM® processors. The processor 405 is in communication with a
5 memory 410 and a communications port 415 (*e.g.*, for communicating with one or more other devices). The memory 410 may comprise an appropriate combination of magnetic, optical and/or semiconductor memory, and may include, for example, Random Access Memory (RAM), Read-Only Memory (ROM), a compact disc and/or a hard disk. The processor 405 and the memory 410 may each be, for
10 example: (i) located entirely within a single computer or other device; or (ii) connected to each other by a remote communication medium, such as a serial port cable, telephone line or radio frequency transceiver. In one embodiment, the computer 400 may comprise one or more devices that are connected to a remote server computer for maintaining databases.

15 [0244] The memory 410 stores a program 420 for controlling the processor 405. The processor 405 performs instructions of the program 420, and thereby operates in accordance with the present invention, and particularly in accordance with the methods described in detail herein. The program 420 may be stored in a compressed, uncompiled and/or encrypted format. The program 420 furthermore
20 includes program elements that may be necessary, such as an operating system, a database management system and “device drivers” for allowing the processor 405 to interface with computer peripheral devices. Appropriate program elements are known to those skilled in the art, and need not be described in detail herein.

[0245] According to an embodiment of the present invention, the instructions
25 of the program 420 may be read into a main memory from another computer-readable medium, such from a ROM to RAM. Execution of sequences of the instructions in program 420 causes processor 405 to perform the process steps described herein. In alternate embodiments, hard-wired circuitry may be used in place of, or in combination with, software instructions for implementation of the

processes of the present invention. Thus, embodiments of the present invention are not limited to any specific combination of hardware and software.

[0246] The memory 410 also stores a plurality of databases, including a feature database 425, a condition database 430, a gaming device database 435, a player database 440, a performance database 445, and an alternate payout database 450. Each of these databases is described in detail below and example structures are depicted with sample entries in the accompanying figures. As will be understood by those skilled in the art, the schematic illustrations and accompanying descriptions of the sample databases presented herein are exemplary arrangements for stored representations of information. Any number of other arrangements may be employed besides those suggested by the tables shown. For example, even though six separate databases are illustrated, the invention could be practiced effectively using any number of functionally equivalent databases. Similarly, the illustrated entries of the databases represent exemplary information only; those skilled in the art will understand that the number and content of the entries can be different from those illustrated herein. Further, despite the depiction of the databases as tables, an object-based model could be used to store and manipulate the data types of the present invention and likewise, object methods or behaviors can be used to implement the processes of the present invention.

[0247] Note that, although these databases are described as being stored in a gaming device, in other embodiments of the present invention some or all of these databases may be partially or wholly stored in another device, such as one or more of the peripheral devices 240, the peripheral device server 245, one or more of the gaming devices 230, a slot server (if different from the computer 210), another device, or a combination thereof. Further, some or all of the data described as being stored in the databases 425, 430, 435, 440, 445, and 450 may be partially or wholly stored (in addition to or in lieu of being stored in the memory 410 of the computer 400) in a memory of one or more other devices, such as one or more of the peripheral devices 240, one or more of the gaming devices 230, the peripheral device server 245 and / or a slot server (if different from computer 210).

[0248] Referring now to Fig. 5, an exemplary tabular representation 500 illustrates one embodiment of the feature database 425 (Fig. 4) that may be stored in the computer 400. The tabular representation 500 of the feature database includes a number of example records or entries, each defining a feature that may
5 be enabled on a gaming device 300 by the computer 400 (or the gaming device 300). Those skilled in the art will understand that the feature database may include any number of entries.

[0249] The tabular representation 500 also defines fields for each of the entries or records. The fields specify: (i) a feature identifier 502 that uniquely identifies a
10 particular feature (*e.g.*, uniquely identifies a particular option, mode, or parameter for affecting the operation of one or more games and / or one or more gaming devices), (ii) a feature name 504 that includes a name of the particular feature, (iii) a description 506 that contains a description (*e.g.*, a text description) of the enhancement(s) provided by the feature to play on a gaming device, and (iv)
15 category 508 that stores an indication of a group or category of features with which the feature may be identified.

[0250] The feature name 504, the category 508, and / or the description 506 may be used in outputting information and messages to a player (*e.g.*, at display device 355 of the gaming device 300). For example, a player may receive a
20 displayed offer: “Click here for Free Telephone Calls!”. In another example, the player’s selection of a feature from a list of displayed features of the same category 508 may cause the description 506 to be displayed in a display area of a gaming device.

[0251] Referring now to Fig. 6, an exemplary tabular representation 600
25 illustrates one embodiment of the condition database 430 (Fig. 4) that may be stored in the computer 400. The tabular representation 600 of the condition database includes a number of example records or entries, each defining a condition that may be used for determining whether a feature should be enabled (or disabled) on a gaming device 300 by the computer 400 (or the gaming device 300).

Those skilled in the art will understand that the condition database may include any number of entries.

[0252] The tabular representation 600 also defines fields for each of the entries or records. The fields specify: (i) a feature identifier 602 that identifies a particular feature, and (ii) a condition for enabling feature 604 that includes an indication of one or more requirements that must be satisfied in order to enable (or to keep enabled) the particular feature.

[0253] As discussed herein, a condition for enabling feature 604 may correspond to one or more requirements for enabling a feature (and / or for keeping an enabled feature enabled). A condition may alternatively correspond to one or more requirements for disabling a feature (and / or for keeping the feature disabled). Those skilled in the art will readily understand that a condition described as a condition for enabling a feature may suggest a condition for disabling a feature, and vice versa. For example, a condition that no more than fifty players can be playing a particular type of slot machine in order for a particular feature to be enabled may also suggest a condition that the feature is to be disabled if the number of players exceeds fifty.

[0254] In some embodiments, however, a condition for disabling or enabling a feature may not necessarily suggest its opposite. For example, a described condition may indicate that a disabled feature should be enabled if ten or more players are playing video poker. However, the feature, once enabled, may or may not be disabled if the number of players playing video poker falls below ten, for example.

[0255] Various types of information and factors on which conditions may be based are described herein, and other criteria and requirements will be readily understood by one skilled in the art in light of the present disclosure. Some examples of conditions include, but are not limited to:

- (i) Whether amount of revenue generated at a gaming device while a feature is being used (*e.g.*, an amount of coin-in and / or transaction

- amounts received from players in association with offers for products/services and other transactions at the gaming device) exceeds a predetermined minimum threshold);
- 5 (ii) Whether an average amount wagered by a player (or players) while a feature is in use is greater than a historical average wager amount of the player;
- (iii) An identity of a player operating the gaming device (*e.g.*, some features may be available only to certain players, or only to players who use player tracking cards;
- 10 (iv) Past gambling activity of a player (*e.g.*, whether the year-to-date coin-in by a player is less than a predetermined threshold);
- (v) Current gambling activity (*e.g.*, activity during a current session, or during a current trip to a casino) of a player (*e.g.*, whether a current credit balance is less than a predetermined maximum amount, or
- 15 whether an average rate of play during a current gaming session is greater than a predetermined threshold for enabling the feature);
- (vi) Anticipated future gambling activity of a player (*e.g.*, whether a particular player (or players) is likely to stop gambling within the next ten minutes);
- 20 (vii) A preference of one or more players (*e.g.*, whether a majority of players prefer a particular feature, or whether a particular player has previously indicated a preference for the feature);
- (viii) A game that a player is currently playing (*e.g.*, a feature for providing an interactive tour of a game's bonus round may be enabled if the
- 25 player is currently playing a game that is relatively new to the casino);
- (ix) A type of gaming device a player is currently playing (*e.g.*, a feature may be enabled for video poker machines but not for video blackjack machines);

- (x) A location of the gaming device (*e.g.*, a feature may be enabled if the gaming device is near a door of a casino floor, but may not be enabled if the gaming device is near a poker room);
- 5 (xi) Information about the compatibility or suitability of the feature with a game and /or with the gaming device (*e.g.*, a feature for providing an interactive tour of a game's bonus round may not be enabled for a game that does not have a bonus round, or for a gaming device offering only games without bonus rounds);
- 10 (xii) A manufacturer that produces a gaming device (*e.g.*, a feature may only be enabled at the gaming device if the gaming device is produced by a specific manufacturer);
- (xiii) A developer, licensor, vendor, or other provider of a feature (*e.g.*, a feature may only be enabled on gaming devices whose manufacturers have agreements with the provider of the feature); and
- 15 (xiv) A developer, licensor, vendor, or other provider of a game available on the gaming device (*e.g.*, a game vendor may stipulate that only certain types of feature may be enabled on devices offering its games).

[0256] In some embodiments, the predetermined condition may be based on the time of day. For example, a feature for providing a tour of a slot machine may
 20 be disabled between the hours of 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. (typically peak hours for gambling), because the operator of the slot machine is aware that players tend to operate the slot machine in regular mode during these hours anyway.

[0257] Examples of time-related predetermined conditions that may need to be satisfied before a feature is enabled on a gaming device include, but are not limited
 25 to:

- (i) A period of time since an event (*e.g.*, the feature may be automatically disabled after a certain period of time after the feature is initially enabled, after the feature is first used, after the feature is used a predetermined number of times, etc.); and

- (ii) A time of day (*e.g.*, the feature may be disabled during particular times of the day).

[0258] Other appropriate time-related predetermined conditions will be recognized by one of ordinary skill in the art after reading the present application.

- 5 Examples of predetermined conditions related to indications from parties, that may need to be satisfied before a feature is enabled on the gaming device include, but are not limited to:

- 10 (i) Whether a signal was provided, by or on behalf of a casino or other operator of the gaming device, indicating that the feature should be enabled (*e.g.*, a signal received from a casino employee observing a player becoming bored and / or discouraged in playing the gaming device);
- 15 (ii) Whether a signal was provided, by or on behalf of a regulatory group (*e.g.*, a state, federal, or local government agency for regulating gambling activities), indicating that the feature can (or must) be enabled (*e.g.*, a signal received from a state gaming commission indicating that the feature meets regulatory approval); and
- 20 (iii) Whether a signal was provided, by or on behalf of a provider of the feature (*e.g.*, a game manufacturer, a patent holder), indicating that the feature can be enabled.

- [0259]** Other appropriate predetermined conditions related to indications received from or otherwise provided by any of various parties will be recognized by one of ordinary skill in the art after reading the present application. Note that indications such as those discussed herein may be provided in a variety of different
- 25 ways, including, but not limited to: (i) using an input device of a server computer (*e.g.*, a keyboard); (ii) using an input device of a gaming device (*e.g.*, a touch screen); and (iii) using a peripheral device (described in further detail herein) in communication with a server computer and / or a gaming device.

- [0260]** In some embodiments, the provided indication from a party may
- 30 comprise an authorization code, as discussed further herein. Examples of

predetermined conditions related to authorization codes, that may need to be satisfied before a feature is enabled on the gaming device include, but are not limited to:

- (i) Whether at least one authorization code has been provided;
 - 5 (ii) A period of time since at least one authorization code was provided (*e.g.*, thirty days ago); and
 - (iii) A type of authorization code that has been provided (*e.g.*, different authorization codes may enable the same feature in different ways, such as for different periods of time).
- 10 **[0261]** Other appropriate predetermined conditions related to authorization codes will be recognized by one of ordinary skill in the art after reading the present application. Examples of predetermined conditions related to information about a casino that may need to be satisfied before a feature is enabled on the gaming device include, but are not limited to:
- 15 (i) What casino operates a gaming device (*e.g.*, a feature may be enabled at a first casino but is to be disabled at a second casino, even if the casinos are commonly owned or operated and may have access to the same features);
 - (ii) A location or jurisdiction of a casino (*e.g.*, a feature may be disabled
20 within a first geographic region, such as the state of Nevada, but enabled within a second geographic region, such as an American Indian reservation in the state of Arizona);
 - (iii) A measure of usage of gaming devices at a casino (*e.g.*, a tutorial
25 feature on how to play the bonus round on a particular type of slot machine may be disabled if more than 90% of all such machines are in use, as there the clear demand for the slot machines indicates that there is no need to entice additional players by enabling the tutorial feature);
and

- (iv) Revenue management information for a casino (*e.g.*, one or more conditions may be established to maximize revenue, such as by establishing a condition that if a casino hotel is only half full, then a feature that offers hotel rooms to players should be enabled).

5 **[0262]** Other appropriate predetermined conditions related to information about a casino will be recognized by one of ordinary skill in the art after reading the present application.

10 **[0263]** Another example of a predetermined condition comprises a minimum number of games played by a player on a gaming device. For example, it may be determined that it is desirable that a player playing one hundred games on a gaming device should be rewarded by enabling a feature on the gaming device.

15 **[0264]** In another example, it may be determined whether an outcome determined for a player playing a game at the determined gaming device satisfies a predetermined condition for enabling a feature. For instance, a gaming device may determine an outcome in a manner well known in the art. An outcome, as used herein, comprises at least one indicia that is utilized to inform a player of whether a benefit (*e.g.*, a payout) has been won by the player as a result of playing a game. In a reeled slot machine game, for example, a set of symbols displayed along a payline comprises an outcome of a game. Some of the possible combinations of symbols obtainable on the reeled slot machine correspond to a payout. Thus, a player is informed of whether he has won a payout by displaying a set of symbols along the payline. If the set of symbols along the payline correspond to a payout (*e.g.*, as displayed on a payout table of the reeled slot machine), then the player is informed that he has won the corresponding payout once the set of symbols is displayed along the payline. In a video poker gaming device, as another example, the set of cards comprising the final hand comprises the outcome of a game.

25 **[0265]** The above examples of predetermined conditions have been provided for purposes of illustrating various embodiments consistent with the process 100D (Fig. 1D), and with some other methods for determining whether a feature should be enabled or disabled on a gaming device. Other types of predetermined

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conditions and types of information on which such conditions may be based, are described herein.

[0266] Referring now to Fig. 7, an exemplary tabular representation 700 illustrates one embodiment of the gaming device database 435 (Fig. 4) that may be stored in the computer 400. The tabular representation 700 of the gaming device database includes a number of example records or entries, each defining a gaming device that may be in communication (*e.g.*, over a LAN or WAN) with computer 400. Those skilled in the art will understand that the gaming device database may include any number of entries.

[0267] The tabular representation 700 also defines fields for each of the entries or records. The fields specify: (i) a gaming device identifier 702 that uniquely identifies a particular gaming device (*e.g.*, uniquely identifies a particular slot machine on a casino floor or a PC communicating with an online casino), (ii) a gaming device type 704 that stores a description or designation of the type of gaming device, (iii) a features enabled 706 that stores an indication or identifier of one or more features currently enabled on the gaming device, (iv) a features in use 708 that stores an indication or identifier of one or more features currently being used on the gaming device, (v) a benchmark theoretical win 710 that indicates a theoretical win for the gaming device (*e.g.*, a historical theoretical win), and (vi) a location 712 that stores an indication of the physical location of the particular gaming device.

[0268] The gaming device database may be used by computer 400 to, for example, communicate with one or more gaming devices and to identify a gaming device that data is being transmitted to or received from. For example, the computer 400 may instruct a gaming device as to which features should be enabled and / or made active at the gaming device, transmit a random number to the gaming device, transmit an indication of a feature for use by the gaming device, update information in one or more databases of the gaming device, and receive information associated with a player of the gaming device (*e.g.*, a player identifier, player preferences, an indication of wagers placed or number of games played by a

player, an indication of duration of play by a player at the gaming device, etc.).

Some of this information may be stored in association with the gaming device. For example, the gaming device may store an indication of the last time that a feature was made active on a particular gaming device.

- 5 **[0269]** The gaming device type 704 stores an indication of what types of games are available on the particular gaming device. Such information may be used, for example, to determine whether to enable a feature on a gaming device. For example, in one embodiment it may be desirable that a particular feature is not made available for use at a video blackjack machines during particular times of
- 10 day. Accordingly, the computer 400 may consider whether a gaming device is a video blackjack machine and the time of day in determining whether a feature should be enabled on the gaming device.

- [0270]** The features enabled 706 stores an indication of what features are currently enabled for use on the particular gaming device, and the features in use
- 15 708 stores an indication of what features are currently active on the particular gaming device. Such information may be used, for example, to determine whether to enable a feature on a gaming device. For example, in one embodiment it may be desirable that a first feature is not made active if second feature is already active on the particular gaming device. For instance, a rule or condition may specify that the
- 20 first feature should only be enabled if the second feature is active on the gaming device. Further, such information may be used, for example, to track the usage of different features. For instance, features in use 708 can be used to determine how many gaming devices a particular feature is active on at any given time.

- [0271]** The benchmark theoretical win 710 stores an indication of a theoretical
- 25 win of the gaming device that may be used, for example, as the basis for determining whether one or more features can be correlated to an effect on the theoretical win of a particular gaming device. For example, benchmark theoretical win 710 may be a value determined with respect to a particular period of time, such as a period of time preceding when a particular feature was first enabled on
- 30 the gaming device. A second theoretical win may be calculated for a period during

which the feature has been enabled. Thus, any difference between the benchmark and the theoretical win while the feature has been enabled may be correlated to the feature as a useful measure of performance of the feature. For instance, if the enabling of the feature is correlated to an increase in the theoretical win for the gaming device, then it may be determined (*e.g.*, by a slot server) to keep the feature enabled based on this increased performance. In another example, the benchmark theoretical win 710 may be of a different gaming device, or may be an average for two or more gaming devices. For instance, such benchmarks may be useful in determining any difference in theoretical win between gaming devices having different features in use, or for comparing a gaming device with no features active to one having one or more features active.

[0272] Although a benchmark theoretical win is described above with respect to a gaming device, it will be readily understood that other types of benchmark values may be used, in addition to or in lieu of a theoretical win value. For example, benchmark values may be established appropriate for comparison with various types of measures of performance, usage, and / or profitability. Some examples of benchmark values include, but are not limited to, a number of handle pulls per hour, a number of paylines activated on a slot machine, and an average wager size per handle pull. Benchmark values may also be established for information related to ancillary entities (*e.g.*, sponsors of offers made available in accordance with a feature). Some examples include, but are not limited to, a number of restaurant covers, an average price per check (*e.g.*, in a restaurant), an occupancy of a showroom or theater, an average daily room rate at a hotel, and a percentage of rooms that are occupied in a hotel.

[0273] The gaming device location 712 stores an indication of where a particular gaming device is located. Such information may be used, for example, to determine whether a feature should be enabled on a gaming device. For example, in one embodiment it may be desirable that a particular feature be enabled for play of one gaming device in a designated area of a casino per predetermined period of time (*e.g.*, at least once every five minutes for a particular bank of slot machines). Accordingly, the computer 400 may track when the

feature is enabled and, if this has not occurred within a predetermined period of time in a designated area of a casino, the computer 400 may select a gaming device in that area and instruct it to enable the feature for play.

[0274] Referring now to Fig. 8, an exemplary tabular representation 800 illustrates an exemplary embodiment of a player database 440 (Fig. 4) that may be stored in computer 400. The tabular representation 800 of the player database includes a number of example records or entries, each defining a player who may be a member of a slot club of a casino or otherwise registered with or known to a casino or other entity. Those skilled in the art will understand that the player database may include any number of entries.

[0275] The tabular representation 800 also defines fields for each of the entries or records. The fields specify: (i) a player identifier 802 that uniquely identifies a player, (ii) a name 804 of a player, (iii) a financial account identifier 806 associated with a player, (iv) an indication of comp points 808 available to a player, (v) a theoretical win / [loss] 810, (vi) an actual win / [loss] 812 for a player, and (vii) a feature preference(s) 814.

[0276] The information in the player database 440 may be created and updated, for example, based on information received from a player, a casino employee, a gaming device 230, a peripheral device 240, and / or peripheral device server 245. For example, the information may be created when a player registers with a casino and receives a player tracking card encoded with the player identifier. The information may be subsequently updated when a player requests to update the information (*e.g.* when a player indicates a desire to change a preferred feature) or when additional information is obtained about the player via the casino's interactions with the player (*e.g.* the lifetime theoretical win may be updated on an ongoing basis as the player plays games at a casino).

[0277] The player identifier 802 may be, for example, an alphanumeric code associated with a player who may operate a gaming device or play a table game at a casino. The player identifier 802 may be generated or selected, for example, by the computer 210 or by the player (*e.g.*, when a player first registers with a casino).

For each player, the player database 440 may also store the player's name 804 (*e.g.*, for use in outputting messages to the player). In one or more embodiments the player's name may comprise a nickname or other designation for the player that is selected by the player or the casino. In one or more embodiments, the
5 nickname may comprise a designation that reflects the player's status (*e.g.*, "premium player"). Such a status may indicate, for example, the typical spending range of the player or other indication of how valuable the player is considered to be by the casino. Such a designation may or may not be known to the player.

[0278] The financial account identifier 806 (*e.g.*, a credit card account number,
10 a debit card account number, a checking account number, a casino financial account number, or digital payment protocol information) associated with the player. The financial account identifier 806 may be used, for example, to credit a payment to the player (*e.g.*, wherein a benefit obtained by the player comprises a monetary amount) and / or to debit a wager amount.

15 [0279] The comp points 808 stores an indication of the number of comp points that a player is currently entitled to. Comp point programs are a common method for a casino to reward players by awarding points to players as a reward for certain gambling behavior that a casino finds desirable. Although the comp points programs differ from casino to casino, in a typical comp point program a player
20 accumulates comp points based on (i) a total amount of coins wagered, or (ii) a total amount of coins paid out. Alternatively, comp points may be awarded based on, for example, (i) the length of time or a number of game plays at a gaming device or table game; (ii) the average wager of a player; and/or (iii) for playing a particular gaming device or group of gaming devices. As the player accumulates
25 comp points the player may exchange some or all of the comp points for goods or services specified by the comp point program. For example, a player may exchange 800 comp points for a dinner at a casino restaurant. As the player exchanges comp points for a good or service the exchanged comp points are deducted from the player's comp point balance reflected in field 808 of tabular
30 representation 800. In some comp point programs the rewards are defined in terms of dollar amounts rather than points. In yet other comp point programs the points

are exchangeable into dollar amounts based on a schedule defined by the casino, allowing the player to convert the accumulated points into dollar amounts and then use the dollar amounts to purchase goods or services from the casino.

[0280] The theoretical win / [loss] 810 stores an indication of the theoretical win of the casino based on the playing activity of the player since the playing activity of the player has been tracked. In other words, the historical theoretical win / [loss] 810 may be a “lifetime” theoretical win. In other embodiments a historical theoretical win / [loss] based on other periods of time may be stored in addition to or instead of the lifetime historical theoretical win / [loss]. For example, an annual or session theoretical win / [loss] may be stored. The actual win/[loss] 812 stores an indication of the actual dollar amount that the corresponding player has won or lost while gambling at the casino. A casino loss is indicated in brackets in the tabular representation 800.

[0281] In some embodiments of the present invention, a determination of whether to enable a feature on a gaming device and / or whether to offer to activate a feature for a player may be based on the theoretical win / [loss] and / or actual win / [loss] of the player playing the game. For example, using the process 100D, in step 165 it may be determined if two predetermined conditions have been satisfied: (i) that a player’s actual win / [loss] is a loss of at least a predetermined value (assuming, for this example, that the win / [loss] is calculated for a particular gaming session); and (ii) that the gaming device at which the player is playing is compatible with the feature. Satisfaction of these two predetermined conditions may correspond to enabling the feature for use on the player’s gaming device.

[0282] It should be understood that although a player identifier and information related to each registered player is described in detail, a player need not be registered in order to be able to use features enabled on a gaming device. Accordingly, registration of a player and storing of information related to a player is not necessary for practice of the present invention.

[0283] The feature preference(s) 814 store one or more preferences for a feature. For example, a preference may be that a particular feature is enabled on

whatever gaming device the player is playing. Such player preferences may be provided by the player directly. For example, a player may tell a casino employee, who may in turn enter an indication of the preference to the player database. In another example, a player may be prompted by a gaming device 230 to store a current configuration of one or more features as a feature preference. Alternatively, a player preference may be determined indirectly. For example, a casino employee may observe a player's reaction and decide that the player really does not like a particular feature or that a player really enjoys a particular type of offer that may be provided in accordance with one or more features. In another example of how a player preference may be determined indirectly, a player's gambling behavior may be tracked to determine whether a player continues to keep playing for an extended period of time or stops playing shortly after a particular feature is made active.

[0284] According to some embodiments, some or all of the exemplary information depicted in Fig. 8 may be stored on a player tracking card. For example, an indication of one or more feature preferences of a player may be stored on a player tracking card and accessed by one or more gaming devices 230, peripheral device server 245, another peripheral device 240, and / or computer 210.

[0285] Referring now to Fig. 9A, an exemplary tabular representation 900A illustrates an exemplary embodiment of a performance database 445 (Fig. 4) that may be stored in computer 400. The tabular representation 900A of the performance database includes a number of example records or entries, each defining a gaming session of a player at a gaming device. Those skilled in the art will understand that the performance database may include any number of entries.

[0286] The tabular representation 900A also defines fields for each of the entries or records. The fields specify: (i) a session identifier 902 that uniquely identifies a session of gaming activity by a player, (ii) a gaming device identifier 904 that identifies a gaming device at which the player's gaming activity takes place, (iii) a player identifier 906 that identifies a player participating in the gaming session, (iv) a length of session 908 that includes an indication of the

duration of the particular gaming session, (v) a total coin-in 910 that indicates a total amount wagered by the player during the session, (vi) a session theoretical win per minute 912, (vii) an increase in theoretical win per minute 914 that indicates a difference between the session theoretical win per win and a particular benchmark value (*e.g.*, benchmark theoretical win 710 of Fig. 7), and (viii) an active features 916 that indicates one or more features that are or were active during the particular session.

[0287] The information in this exemplary embodiment of the performance database 440 may be created and updated, for example, based on information received from a player, a casino employee, a gaming device 230, a peripheral device 240, and / or peripheral device server 245. For example, the information may be created when a player inserts his player tracking card at a gaming device 230 (*e.g.*, a new session entry may be created whenever a player is first identified at a gaming device). The information may be updated subsequently when additional information is obtained about the player via the player's interactions with the gaming device during a session. For example, the total coin-in, and indications of the active features may be updated on an ongoing basis as the player places wagers at the gaming device and selects different features. In another example, the session theoretical win per minute (and the increase in theoretical win per minute) may be updated on an ongoing basis during a session (or, alternatively, only at the end of a session) based on the player's wagering.

[0288] Information stored in this exemplary embodiment of the performance database 445 may be used in making various determinations for managing features. In some embodiments of the present invention, a determination of whether to enable or disable a feature on a gaming device, and / or whether to offer to activate a feature for a player, may be based on the total coin-in, session theoretical win per minute and / or the increase in theoretical win per minute. For example, using the process 100B, in step 135, the determination of whether to disable one or more enabled features may be based on a measure of performance such as the total coin-in, the session theoretical win per minute, and / or the increase in theoretical win per minute. If the increase in theoretical win per minute is greater than a

predetermined value, the enabled features may remain enabled. Otherwise, they may be disabled. Note that such a determination need not take place during the player's session, but may occur at any time (*e.g.*, in accordance with a schedule for managing the features of the system).

5 **[0289]** It should be understood that the sessions depicted in the tabular representation 900A are for illustrative purposes only. In some embodiments, a player's session may include information about play of more than one gaming device, and may include information about one or more periods of time in which the player was not playing a gaming device (*e.g.*, the session may correspond to an
10 entire week stay at a casino hotel). Fig. 9C, for example, depicts exemplary information representing a player's trip to a casino, and is discussed in detail below.

[0290] Referring now to Fig. 9B, an exemplary tabular representation 900B illustrates another exemplary embodiment of a performance database 445 (Fig. 4)
15 that may be stored in computer 400. The tabular representation 900B of the performance database includes a number of example records or entries, each defining a gaming session in which an exemplary feature "Free Telephone Calls" was used. Those skilled in the art will understand that the performance database may include any number of entries.

20 **[0291]** The tabular representation 900B also defines fields for each of the entries or records. The fields specify: (i) a session identifier 920 that uniquely identifies a session in which the exemplary feature was used, (ii) a length of session 922 that includes an indication of the duration of the particular gaming session, (iii) a coin-in per minute 924 that indicates the total coin-in for the session
25 averaged on a per minute basis, (iv) a session theoretical win per minute 926, (v) a total cost of calls 928 that indicates a cost of providing the "Free Telephone Calls" during the session, and (vi) a net theoretical profit from session 930 that indicates a difference between the costs incurred in providing the feature and the session theoretical win.

[0292] As discussed above with respect to the tabular representation 900A of Fig. 9A, the information in this exemplary embodiment of the performance database 440 may be created and updated, for example, based on information received from a player, a casino employee, a gaming device 230, a peripheral device 240, and / or peripheral device server 245. Similarly, information may be created at the start of a session (*e.g.*, when a player inserts his player tracking card at a gaming device 230), and may be updated subsequently (*e.g.*, as the player uses the feature to make telephone calls, thereby incurring costs to the system and possibly affecting the net theoretical profit of the session).

10 [0293] Various types of information represented in this exemplary embodiment may be used in managing features for gaming devices. For example, the length of session 922 may be helpful as a measure of usage (*e.g.*, in determining whether to keep the feature enabled, in determining whether to enable the feature on additional gaming devices, in determining an amount due to a provider of the feature).

[0294] As discussed variously herein, a measure of profitability of a gaming device (*e.g.*, based on revenue generated at the gaming device) can be useful in managing features on the gaming device (*e.g.*, in determining whether to enable or disable certain features). Note that the particular feature “Free Telephone Calls” incurs a cost (*e.g.*, to the casino providing the telephone service) when it is used by players. Accordingly, a measure of performance of a gaming device and / or of a feature may be based on information about costs of the feature itself (*e.g.*, how profitable it is to provide the feature in light of its associated costs).

25 [0295] Referring now to Fig. 9C, an exemplary tabular representation 900C illustrates another exemplary embodiment of a performance database 445 (Fig. 4) that may be stored in computer 400. The tabular representation 900C of the performance database includes a number of example records or entries, each defining a trip or visit of a player to a casino. Those skilled in the art will understand that the performance database may include any number of entries.

[0296] The tabular representation 900C also defines fields for each of the entries or records. The fields specify: (i) a trip identifier 940 that uniquely identifies a trip or visit of a player to a gaming establishment (*e.g.*, a casino hotel), (ii) a player identifier 942 that identifies the particular player, (iii) a benchmark trip theoretical win 946, (iv) a trip theoretical win 948, and (v) a percentage of play with enabled feature(s) 950. Information in this exemplary embodiment may be created and / or updated as discussed herein with respect to other described embodiments of the performance database 445.

[0297] The trip theoretical win 948 and benchmark trip theoretical win 946 may be used, in a manner similar to that described above with respect to Fig. 9A, to determine a measure of performance of one or more features. The percentage of play with enabled features 950 may be useful as a measure of a player's usage of features generally during a trip, in determining whether or not to change the features enabled for use on gaming devices. In addition, information about how much of the time a player plays with one or more features enabled may be useful in determining what types of features to offer to the player or to make available for selection by the player. For example, a player that tends to spend more time playing with features enabled may be more willing to accept an offer to try a feature in exchange for a fee.

[0298] Referring now to Figs. 9D – 9E, an exemplary tabular representation 900D illustrates another exemplary embodiment of a performance database 445 (Fig. 4) that may be stored in computer 400. The tabular representation 900D of the performance database includes a number of example records or entries, each defining an offer that was made to a player during a session in accordance with one or more active features. Those skilled in the art will understand that the performance database may include any number of entries.

[0299] The tabular representation 900D also defines fields for each of the entries or records. The fields specify: (i) a session identifier 960 that identifies a session of gaming activity by a player, (ii) a gaming device identifier 962 that identifies a gaming device at which the offer was provided in accordance with one

or more features, (iii) a player identifier 964 that identifies a player who received the offer, (iv) an offer 966 that includes an indication (*e.g.*, a description, an offer message) of the offer provided to the player, (v) an accepted 968 that indicates whether the offer was accepted, (vi) an active features 970 that indicates one or
5 more features that were active when the offer was provided, (vii) a cost to offer sponsor 972 that indicates a cost incurred by a sponsor of the offer, (viii) a payment to player 974 that indicates a value of a product, service, or benefit provided to a player, (ix) a payment to casino 975 that indicates value provided to a casino operating the gaming device at which the offer was made, and (x) a
10 payment to manufacturer 976 that indicates a value provided to a manufacturer of a gaming device, feature, or game.

[0300] Information in this exemplary embodiment may be created and / or updated as discussed herein with respect to other described embodiments of the performance database 445. For example, the information may be created when an
15 offer is communicated to a player in accordance with an active feature.

[0301] Some features may enhance play of a gaming device by offering one or more products or services to a player (*e.g.*, in response to particular game events, such as the player winning a payout, or the player pushing a “CASH OUT” button). Some such offers may be sponsored by one or more sponsors. For
20 example, Figs. 9D – 9E depicts an exemplary offer made to a player “P-568249”: “\$30 TO SWITCH LONG DISTANCE TO BIGTEL CO.” The player accepted the offer, which may have been made, in accordance with feature “FEAT-07”, after a player had wagered a predetermined amount at a slot machine without achieving a winning outcome. The payment to player 974 indicates that the amount of \$30
25 was provided to the player (*e.g.*, by increasing the player’s credit balance by \$30). In addition, \$3 was provided in payment to casino 975, and \$2 was provided as payment to manufacturer 976. For example, the sponsor of the offer may have an agreement with the casino that the sponsor will pay the casino a fee (*e.g.*, \$3) for each player that accepts its offer. Similarly, the sponsor may agree to pay a \$2 to
30 the manufacturer of the feature for each player that accepts the offer. The cost to offer sponsor 972 indicates that the total cost to the sponsor for the accepted offer

was \$35. Note that the sponsor may value the player, who has agreed to switch long distance telephone service, in excess of the cost to the sponsor of providing the \$35 in benefits and fees to the player and other parties.

[0302] Information represented in this exemplary embodiment of the performance database 445 may be used in making various determinations for managing features. In some embodiments of the present invention, a determination of whether to enable or disable a feature on a gaming device, and / or whether to offer to activate a feature for a player, may be based on the number of offers made in accordance with the feature that have been accepted. Thus, the number of accepted offers (or the percentage of offers made that were accepted, etc.) may be a useful measure of performance and / or usage of the feature. For example, a feature that provides offers with a low rate of acceptance may be disabled as it may be distracting or annoying to players.

[0303] Referring now to Fig. 10, an exemplary tabular representation 1000 illustrates an exemplary embodiment of a alternate payout database 450 (Fig. 4) that may be stored in computer 400. The tabular representation 1000 of the alternate payout database includes a number of example records or entries, each defining an outcome determined during a gaming session. Those skilled in the art will understand that the player database may include any number of entries.

[0304] The tabular representation 1000 also defines fields for each of the entries or records. The fields specify: (i) session information 1002 that includes information about the session in which the outcomes occurred (*e.g.*, a session identifier that identifies the session, an indication of the features (if any) active when the outcome was determined), (ii) an outcome identifier 1004 that uniquely identifies the particular outcome achieved during the session, (iii) an outcome 1006 that includes an indication of the outcome (*e.g.*, a description of a reel symbol combination or a hand of cards), and (iv) a payout 1008 that indicates a payout or other benefit determined during the session based on the outcome. The fields further specify alternative payouts 1010, 1012, and 1014 that would have been

received by a player, based on the determined outcome, if features “FEAT-12”, “FEAT-14”, and “FEAT-16” had been active, respectively.

[0305] The information in this exemplary embodiment of the alternative payout database 450 may be created and updated, for example, based on
5 information received from a player, a casino employee, a gaming device 230, a peripheral device 240, and / or peripheral device server 245. For example, the information may be created when a player begins playing a gaming device, or when a player begins a gaming session. The information may be updated subsequently when additional information is obtained about the player via the
10 player’s interactions with the gaming device during a session. For example, the outcomes received and the payouts provided may be updated on an ongoing basis as the player plays a game at a gaming device. In another example, the alternative payouts may be determined and updated on an ongoing basis during a session based on information about various features (*e.g.*, based on alternate payout table
15 that is associated with a feature), such as may be stored in feature database 425.

[0306] The exemplary information depicted in the tabular representation 1000 shows three outcomes received during a session “SESS-25” while no features were active. The sample entry for “BELL-BELL-ORANGE” indicates that a payout of “0” (*e.g.*, no coins paid out) was associated with that outcome during the session.
20 However, if the player had been using “FEAT-12” (*e.g.*, a feature providing for a reverse payout mode), the payout the player would have earned for the same outcome is “1” (*e.g.*, one coin).

[0307] Information in the alternative payout database may be used, for example, to indicate to a player the advantages of activating a particular feature.
25 For example, a message may be displayed to a player: “If you were playing in Reverse Mode, you would have won a coin! Would you like to activate Reverse Mode now?” In another example, such information could be used to determine a total payout that a player might have received during a session, over a number of plays of a game, and / or during a period of time, if a particular feature (or features)
30 had been enabled. Indications of how profitable a feature may be (or could have

been) to a player may be advantageous in encouraging players to use various features.

[0308] *e.g.* Referring now to Fig. 11A, an embodiment 1100A of a plan view of a gaming device 230 is illustrated. In the embodiment 1100A, the gaming device
5 230 comprises a five reel slot machine. The slot machine 1100A comprises a display area 1105 in which an outcome for a game of the slot machine is displayed to the player. The display area 1105 may, for example, be a video display that displays simulations of reels. The display area 1105 may, in another example, be glass behind which are located mechanical reels. Display area 1105 is an
10 exemplary embodiment of the display device 355, described with respect to Fig. 3.

[0309] The slot machine 1100A also comprises a display area 1110 in which information about one or more features, such as descriptions of features, is displayed to the player. The display area 1110 may, for example, be a video display that displays images and / or text. Display area 1110 is another exemplary
15 embodiment of the display device 355, described with respect to Fig. 3.

[0310] The slot machine 1100A further comprises a display area 1118 in which images or text indicating available features for play of the slot machine 110 are displayed to the player. The display area 1118 may, for example, be a video display that displays images and / or text, and that may include a touch screen. A
20 highlighted indication of a feature 1172 is displayed in display area 118. Display area 1118 is another exemplary embodiment of the display device 355, described with respect to Fig. 3.

[0311] Slot machine 1100A further comprises a handle 1120. A player may initiate the movement of the reels in display area 1105 by pulling on the handle
25 1120. Alternatively, a player may initiate the movement of the reels in display 1105 by actuating the start button 1125. Either or both of handle 1120 and start button 1125 are exemplary embodiments of the input device 365, described with respect to Fig. 3.

[0312] Slot machine 1100A also comprises a player tracking device 1130, which is an example of the player tracking device 360 that was described with respect to Fig. 3. The player tracking device 360 may comprise a player tracking card reader and a display (*e.g.*, an LED display) for outputting information related to the player identifier (*e.g.*, player's name and number of comp points associated with player's account).

[0313] Also a component of slot machine 1100A is another display area 1135, for outputting information to a player. The display area 1135 may be utilized, for example, to inform a player of which features are currently active on the slot machine 1100A and / or may provide a way for the player to deactivate an active feature. The display area 1135 may, for example, be a video display including a touch screen. Display area 1135 is another exemplary embodiment of the display device 355, described with respect to Fig. 3.

[0314] Payment system 1140, an exemplary embodiment of payment system 375, comprises a bill acceptor / a credit card reader 1150, and a coin acceptor 1155. A player may utilize payment system 1140 to provide a wager for playing a game and / or for providing payment for provision of a feature available on slot machine 1100A.

[0315] Slot machine 1100A further comprises a credit meter balance 1160, which is an exemplary embodiment of a benefit output device 350 that was described with respect to Fig. 3. The credit meter balance reflects the amount of electronic credits currently available to a player. The electronic credits may be used by a player, for example, as wagers for games played on the gaming device. The electronic credits may also be "cashed out" as coins, bills, tokens, a cashless gaming receipt, and / or credits to another financial account associated with the player.

[0316] The slot machine 1100A includes yet another display area, display area 1165, which displays a payout schedule of the slot machine 1100A. The payout schedule displays payouts that correspond to various outcomes obtainable on the slot machine 1100A. In one or more embodiments, if an outcome is displayed in

display area 1105 that, as indicated in display area 1165, corresponds to a payout, the credit meter balance 1160 may be increased by an amount of electronic credits corresponding to the payout.

[0317] Finally, the slot machine 1100A comprises a coin tray 1170. Payment
5 to the player may be rendered by dispensing coins into the coin tray 1170. Such coins may be dispensed based on, for example, a player's indication that the player would like to cash out his credit meter balance and / or a payout obtained by a player as a result of playing a game on the slot machine 1100A. The coin tray 1100A is an exemplary embodiment of the benefit output device 350, described
10 with respect to Fig. 3. Note that slot machine 1100A may include different and / or additional components besides those illustrated in Fig. 11A.

[0318] Other exemplary embodiments of a slot machine are depicted in Figs. 11B – 11K. Fig. 11B includes an exemplary display area 1110 indicating a list
15 1174 of the “Top 3 Features” for a day (*e.g.*, the three most commonly selected features for that day). Of course, other types of features or categories of features may be displayed.

[0319] Fig. 11C includes a display area 1118 that includes a list of feature
categories. Categories for features, as well as other types of information related to features, are described variously herein. An exemplary highlighted category 1176
20 is depicted, and a corresponding description is displayed in display area 1110. Fig. 11D depicts three icons corresponding to respective features in display area 1118. A description for a highlighted icon 1178 is provided in display area 1110.

[0320] Fig. 11E depicts an exemplary slot machine 1100E displaying a
message on display 1110 that invites a player to select a feature. Exemplary
25 display area 1118 indicates various available features, some of which are emphasized by the use of particular fonts and sizes. Display area 1135 indicates that no features are currently active on this slot machine.

[0321] Figs. 11F and 11H depict display area 1118 as including two or more
partitions or windows for representing various types of information. For example,

Fig. 11F includes two lists, one of most popular features, and one of most profitable features (*e.g.*, those features that during previous play would have provided (or did provide) the largest payouts). Fig. 11H includes in display area 1118 three overlapping partitions providing different types of information.

- 5 Various types of display areas, including partitions and other “windowed” viewing areas, are described in further detail herein.

[0322] Fig. 11G depicts an exemplary slot machine 1100G that includes information in display area 1118 listing features that would have been most profitable for a player within the last thirty minutes, had they been enabled.

- 10 Display area 1110 provides information to the player explaining the list of features.

[0323] Fig. 11I depicts an exemplary slot machine 1100I that includes a partition or display area 1186 for providing a scrolling display of information about payouts received by players, and a feature that was active when the payout was received. Such information may be useful to some players in deciding

- 15 whether to not they want to activate a particular feature.

[0324] According to one or more embodiments of the present invention, a gaming device may display a message to a player. For example, as depicted in display area 1110 of Fig. 11J, a message may be output to a player to confirm that a player wants to activate a feature and / or to confirm that a player understands what a feature does. Virtual buttons 1188 may be used to accept input from the player in response to the message.

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[0325] Fig. 11K depicts an exemplary slot machine 1100K. Display area 1110 provides an instruction to the player to review the payout table 1165 in order to learn about the differences between the three highlighted features 1190 that the player is considering.

- 25

[0326] As discussed herein, features may be represented, indicated, or displayed to a player in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to, text, icons, images, and animation. For example, as depicted in exemplary slot machine 1100A, a feature may be represented by names, nicknames, or other descriptive

identifiers for the feature (e.g., “Auto-Play Mode”, “Jackpot Only”). Features may also be indicated by icons or other graphics, images, or pictures. For example, a “Jackpot Only” feature may be represented by a picture of a pay table having zeros on all lines except for a jackpot line. Features may also be
5 represented by animated images. For example, an animated image for an “Auto-Play” feature may show a picture of a player watching a slot machine play itself automatically. Other ways of displaying information about features to a player at a gaming device will be recognized by one of ordinary skill in the art after reading the present application.

10 **[0327]** According to some embodiments of the present invention, a slot machine or other gaming device may include multiple video screens, or multiple “windows” or partitioned display areas represented on a single video screen. For example, the slot machine 1100A depicted in Fig. 11A includes display areas 1105, 1110, and 1118. Each display area may be used for displaying various types of
15 information, including information about features. For example, as depicted in Fig. 11A, the display area 1105 displays slot machine reels and is used to indicate outcomes during games played on the slot machine. The display area 1118 is used to display and select features that may be activated on the slot machine, and display area 1135 may be used to display what features are currently activated.

20 **[0328]** As will be recognized by those skilled in the art, a video display screen may be subdivided into one or more movable partitions (a.k.a. “windows”) and an immovable partition (a.k.a. “a desktop”). Each window may be a different partition, and it may be possible to have partitions overlap (i.e., a first partition may obscure some or all of a second partition). For example, as depicted in Fig.
25 11D, display area 1118 may be used to display one or more separate partitions 1180 for displaying information about different types of features. Partitions may be on separate video screens. For example, a slot machine that has two video monitors may have three partitions: two partitions on the first monitor and a third partition on the second monitor. In some embodiments, a first partition may
30 obscure a portion of a second partition. For example, the partitions 1184 in display

area 1118 of the slot machine 1100H may be organized into layers that may overlap, as depicted in Fig. 11H.

[0329] According to some embodiments of the present invention, features may be categorized based on various factors, including, but not limited to: (i) functionality (*e.g.*, the type of enhancement provided), (ii) usage information, (iii) game information (*e.g.*, information about one or more games in which the feature was active), (iv) whether a feature is active or inactive, and (v) suitability of a feature (*e.g.*, for use with a particular gaming device, for use in enhancing a particular game). Other types of information useful for categorizing features will be recognized by one of ordinary skill in the art after reading the present application. Further, it will be understood that one feature may be associated with more than one category (*e.g.*, a category may belong to a first category based on its functionality and may belong a second category based on its rank of profitability to players within the last hour). An indication of a category of feature may be stored, for example, in feature database 425.

[0330] In some embodiments, a category may include features that have resulted in recent jackpots (*e.g.*, during the current day), features that have resulted in the largest jackpots (*e.g.*, within a period of time), features that are most popular (*e.g.*, a “Top 10” list of features that are most commonly selected by other players), features that are most commonly selected by a particular player (*e.g.*, a “Favorites” list of features), and features that were previously selected by a player (*e.g.*, a “Feature History” grouping of features used by a player in a previous gaming session).

[0331] As discussed herein, some features may be categorized or grouped (*e.g.*, for display at a gaming device) based on whether they are currently active (or currently inactive). For example, display area 1135 of Fig. 11A indicates that two features (“Beginner Mode” and “Fractional Bets”) are currently active.

[0332] Determinations as to which category a feature may be associated with may be made by players, casino representatives, and / or the computer 210, for example. A player may indicate that a feature should be placed in a certain

category (*e.g.*, by using a pointer device to drag an icon for the feature to a displayed list of features, by selecting a category option from a displayed menu of items). Alternatively, the computer 400 may analyze a feature to determine one or more properties of the feature. Based on these properties, the controller may
5 categorize the feature (*e.g.*, in the feature database 425).

[0333] In some embodiments, features may be categorized based on information about their suitability for use in at least one particular game, on a particular type of gaming device, or with one or more other features as discussed herein. Similarly, features may be categorized base on their recommended use or
10 uses. For example, a feature may only be available on slot machines and pachinko machines, not on video poker machines, and not recommended for video blackjack machines. Accordingly, a casino server or other system controller may categorize “Auto-Play Mode” as “unsuitable for video poker” or as a “slot machine feature” (*e.g.*, in the feature database 425).

15 [0334] A feature may be indicated at a gaming device in a variety of ways. For example, different visual cues may be used to indicate what category a feature belongs in. Examples of ways in which indications of a feature may vary include, but are not limited to: (i) color (*e.g.*, icons for popular (“hot”) features may be shown in red, while less popular (“cool”) features may be shown in blue); font
20 (*e.g.*, features that provide supplementary benefits may be in bold, while features that involve team play may be in italics); highlighting (*e.g.*, active features may be highlighted, whereas unselected features may not be highlighted); order (*e.g.*, outcome-enhancing features may be listed first, followed by team-play features, etc.).

25 [0335] Other examples of different ways features may be represented at a display device of a gaming device include the use of separate display “windows” or other types of display areas. For example, a first window may show jackpot-enhancing features, a second window may show team-play features, and a third window may show meta-game features. In a second example, a first window may
30 show selected features and a second set of windows may show unselected features.

Headers, footers, and sidebars may also be used to display information about different types of features. Also, the location of an indication related to a feature may vary according to the category or status of the feature, for example. For instance, a player activates a feature, an icon representing the feature may be
5 moved from a displayed list of unselected features (*e.g.*, in a first display area) to a list of selected features (*e.g.*, in a second display area). In another example, an audio signal may be used to indicate a feature. For example, whenever a player selects team play feature, a crowd noise sound may be output by a slot machine. In a second example, an audio message may be communicated (*e.g.*, via an audio
10 speaker) to a player, such as: “Bonus round features include: ‘Firefly Bonus Round’, ‘Paul Bunyan Bonus Round’, ‘Double Dare Bonus’, and ‘Wild Horses Bonus’...”

[0336] In some embodiments, features may be organized and displayed in hierarchical menus (*e.g.*, based on categories). Using hierarchical menus may
15 enable a player to more quickly navigate and select his favorite features (*e.g.*, from a plurality of features).

[0337] According to one or more embodiments of the present invention, as discussed herein, a player may select at least one feature to be activated and / or enabled on a gaming device. According to one embodiment, this may be done
20 using one or more input devices associated with a gaming device (*e.g.*, a touch screen of the slot machine 1100A). As will be readily understood by one skilled in the art, a player may select a feature for use in a variety of different ways, including, but not limited to:

- (i) Clicking icons. For example, a player may use a touch screen or other
25 input device to click on an icon represented a feature to select the feature. Alternatively, a user may “double click” an icon (*e.g.*, using a computer mouse as an input device) to select a feature (*i.e.*, click on an icon twice in quick succession). Note that “clicking” may correspond to a player pressing a button (*e.g.*, pressing a button associated with a
30 trackball or on a computer mouse). Alternatively, “clicking” may

correspond to an alternate method of activating an input device (*e.g.*, touching a region of a touch screen for a short period of time).

- 5 (ii) Dragging and / or dropping displayed objects. For example, features may be represented by icons. A player may “click and drag” an icon from a first area of a video screen to a second area of the video screen (*e.g.*, by using a pointer device). Upon “dropping” the icon in the second area, the feature represented by the icon may be selected for use. For example, a player may drag-and-drop a feature from a window filled with unselected features into a displayed sidebar (*e.g.*, the display area 1118) that only holds selected features.
- 10 (iii) Identifying a feature. For example, a player may select a feature by uniquely identifying the feature in some way. For example, a player may use a keyboard or touch screen to type in the name of a feature.

[0338] According to one or more embodiments of the present invention, a gaming device may output information about at least one feature to a player. Any of the display areas of the slot machine 1100A, for example, may be used to output information about at least one feature to a player. As depicted in Fig. 11A, display area 1100 includes a description of a highlighted feature 1172. This information may be helpful in allowing the player to understand at least one feature, in helping a player to select at least one feature, or in motivating a player to select at least one feature. Examples of information that may be output regarding a feature include, but are not limited to: text, video, audio, interactive tutorial, payout table, and/or historical data. For example, a paragraph describing a feature may be displayed to a player, as depicted in display area 1110 of Fig. 11A. In another example, a full-motion video about a feature may be displayed to a player. In another example, an animated movie may show a player how to use a feature. In yet another example, a gaming device may play a recording describing how to use a feature. In yet another example, a video screen may display an interactive tutorial (*e.g.*, enabled using a website with hyperlinks or a DVD player) describing how to use a feature. According to some embodiments, a feature may affect payout values for a gaming device. In such an embodiment, an altered payout table may be displayed

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to a player. Alternatively other information may be displayed to the player indicating how payouts are altered if a feature is enabled. In yet another example, a gaming device may display a bar graph showing which features have been most popular and most profitable over the last 24 hours. In a second example, as
5 described herein, the computer 400 may determine what outcomes and prizes a player would have won if he had been using a feature during his previous thirty minutes of game play. In some cases, a player may find that if he had been using a different feature or features during the last hour, he would have achieved a different prize (e.g., winning money instead of losing money).

- 10 **[0339]** According to one or more embodiments of the present invention, a gaming device may display a message to a player. For example, as depicted in display area 1110 of Fig. 1100J, a message may be output to a player to confirm that a player wants to activate a feature and / or to confirm that a player understands what a feature does. Virtual buttons 1188 may be used to accept input
15 from the player in response to the message. Messages and alerts may be output to a player for a variety of different reasons. For example, an alert may be displayed to indicate that a selection has been made (e.g., "You have selected 'Jackpot Only Mode'"). In another example, a prompt may be displayed to confirm a selection or deselection made by a player. For example, a player may select a feature "Firefly
20 Bonus Round". To confirm the player's selection, a prompt may be displayed to the player "Are you sure that you want to select Firefly Bonus Round?" The player may then respond to the prompt by pressing a button on a touch screen. In yet another example, an alert may be displayed indicating that a player has made a disallowed selection. For example, a player may attempt simultaneously select
25 "Firefly Bonus Round" and the same time as "Paul Bunyan Bonus Round". The controller may determine that these two features are not compatible and display a message to a player, "Sorry, you can't play 'Firefly Bonus Round' and 'Paul Bunyan Bonus Round' at the same time. Please deselect one of these features."
Also, a message or alert may be communicated to a player based on an impending
30 expiration of a feature, such as a feature that may have been selected (or

purchased) for activation for a particular period of time (e.g., “Auto-Play Mode will expire in two minutes—Would you like to extend this mode?”).

5 [0340] According to some embodiments, a message may be displayed to a player using a partition. For example, a pop-up window, a header, a footer, and/or a sidebar. A new partition may be created on a video screen and this partition may display a message to a player. According to one embodiment, the partition may be closed, removed, or hidden in response to an indication by the player. In another example, a footer on a video screen may be reserved to display messages and alert to a player based on the player’s current activities.

10 [0341] In some embodiments, a message may have an audio component. Examples may include: a ‘beep’ sound that is output anytime a message is displayed on a video screen, a buzzer sound that may be output when a player selects two features that are incompatible, a message may be output in audio form only and may not have a video component (e.g. a player who selects “Jackpot Only
15 Mode” may hear a recorded message “You have selected Jackpot Only Mode.”), and a revving automobile engine sound may be output when a player indicates that he would like to start playing a game with the current features enabled.

[0342] In some embodiments, a message may be output to a player in response to a trigger. According to some embodiments, a trigger may be any event,
20 condition, stimulus relating to an indication by a player or a gaming device being operated by a player. Examples of triggers may include: selecting or deselecting a feature (e.g., a message may be displayed when a player selects a feature and the content of the message may be based on the feature selected), opening or closing a partition (e.g., an alert may be displayed when a player attempts to close or
25 terminate a partition), sorting features (e.g., a message may be displayed “Features have been sorted according to popularity, with the most popular features listed first.”), triggers relating to game play, and/or a player makes an indication using an input device (e.g., a player may press a “Lock” button on a slot machine and in response to this indication, the slot machine may display a message “This slot

machine has been locked. To unlock, please enter your key code and press the 'Enter' button.”)

- [0343]** According to one or more alternative embodiments, a player may save a list of his favorite features on his player tracking card so that he does not have to
- 5 re-enter his selections (*e.g.*, after he takes a break from gambling or moves to another slot machine). This way, all the player has to do to select features on a slot machine is insert his player tracking card- all his favorite features will be automatically selected on the slot machine.

What is claimed:

- 1 1. A method comprising:
2 providing play of a game at a gaming device,
3 in which play of the game is provided in accordance with a first
4 mode of operation;
5 displaying a plurality of selectable indications to a player at a gaming
6 device,
7 in which each selectable indication corresponds to a feature for
8 modifying operation of the gaming device;
9 receiving an indication of at least one feature selected by the player;
10 determining a second mode of operation based on the at least one feature
11 selected by the player; and
12 providing play of the game in accordance with the second mode of
13 operation.
- 1 2. A method comprising:
2 receiving an indication of a player selection of a first feature on a first
3 gaming device;
4 enabling play of the first feature on the first gaming device in accordance
5 with the first feature;
6 determining a measure of profitability of the first gaming device,
7 in which the measure of profitability corresponds to use of the first
8 gaming device while the first feature is enabled for use on the first gaming
9 device;
10 determining a difference between the measure of profitability and a
11 benchmark measure of profitability;
12 determining whether to display a selectable indication of the first feature on
13 a second gaming device based on the difference; and
14 displaying the selectable indication of the first feature on the second
15 gaming device if the selectable indication of the first feature should be displayed.

- 1 3. The method of claim 2, further comprising:
2 displaying a selectable indication of a second feature on the second gaming
3 device if the selectable indication of the first feature should be displayed.
- 1 4. The method of claim 2, further comprising:
2 providing play of at least one game on the first gaming device in
3 accordance with the first feature.
- 1 5. The method of claim 2, further comprising:
2 determining an outcome in at least one game in accordance with the first
3 feature.
- 1 6. The method of claim 2, further comprising:
2 determining a payout for a player in accordance with the first feature.
- 1 7. The method of claim 2, further comprising:
2 determining a payout table in accordance with the first feature.
- 1 8. A method comprising:
2 determining a feature that has been active on at least one gaming device;
3 determining a measure of performance of the feature;
4 determining whether a predetermined condition is satisfied based on the
5 measure of performance;
6 displaying an indication of the feature at a first gaming device if the
7 predetermined condition is satisfied;
8 receiving an indication of a selection by a player of the feature; and
9 modifying an operation of the first gaming device based on the feature.

1 9. The method of claim 8, in which determining the measure of performance
2 of the feature comprises:

3 determining a first theoretical win that is associated with the at least one
4 gaming device;

5 determining a second theoretical win based on play of the at least one
6 gaming device while the feature has been active; and

7 determining a difference between the first theoretical win and the second
8 theoretical win.

1 10. The method of claim 8, in which determining the measure of performance
2 of the feature comprises:

3 determining a first amount wagered at the at least one gaming device;

4 determining a second amount wagered based on play of the at least one
5 gaming device while the feature has been active; and

6 determining a difference between the first amount wagered and the second
7 amount wagered.

1 11. The method of claim 8, in which determining the measure of performance
2 of the feature comprises:

3 determining a measure of profitability of the at least one gaming device.

1 12. The method of claim 11, in which determining the measure of profitability
2 of the feature comprises:

3 determining an amount wagered at the at least one gaming device while the
4 feature has been active; and

5 determining an amount paid out at the at least one gaming device while the
6 feature has been active.

1 13. The method of claim 12, further comprising:

2 determining a difference between the amount wagered and the amount paid
3 out.

1 14. The method of claim 8, in which determining the measure of performance
2 of the feature comprises:
3 determining an amount of coin-in received at the least one gaming device.

1 15. The method of claim 8, in which determining the measure of performance
2 of the feature comprises:
3 determining a period of time that the feature has been active on the at least
4 one gaming device.

1 16. The method of claim 8, in which determining the measure of performance
2 of the feature comprises:
3 determining a number of at least one offer provided to at least one player in
4 accordance with the feature,
5 in which the at least one offer was accepted.

1 17. The method of claim 8, in which determining the measure of performance
2 of the feature comprises:
3 determining a transaction amount corresponding to at least one accepted
4 offer,
5 in which the at least one accepted offer was provided to at least one
6 player in accordance with the feature.

1 18. A method comprising:
2 displaying a first display area at a gaming device,
3 the first display area including information about play of a game;
4 displaying a second display area at a gaming device,
5 the second display area including a plurality of selectable features,
6 in which each selectable feature corresponds to a respective
7 modification of an operation of the gaming device;
8 receiving, via an input device of the gaming device, an indication of a
9 feature selected by a player at the gaming device; and
10 modifying the respective operation of the gaming device that corresponds
11 to the feature selected by the player.

1 19. The method of claim 18, further comprising:
2 displaying a third display area at the gaming device,
3 the third display area including a representation of the feature
4 selected by the player.

1 20. The method of claim 18, in which the respective operation that corresponds
2 to the feature selected by the player comprises at least one of:
3 an operation for determining a payout,
4 an operation for determining an outcome, and
5 an operation for providing at least one offer to the player.

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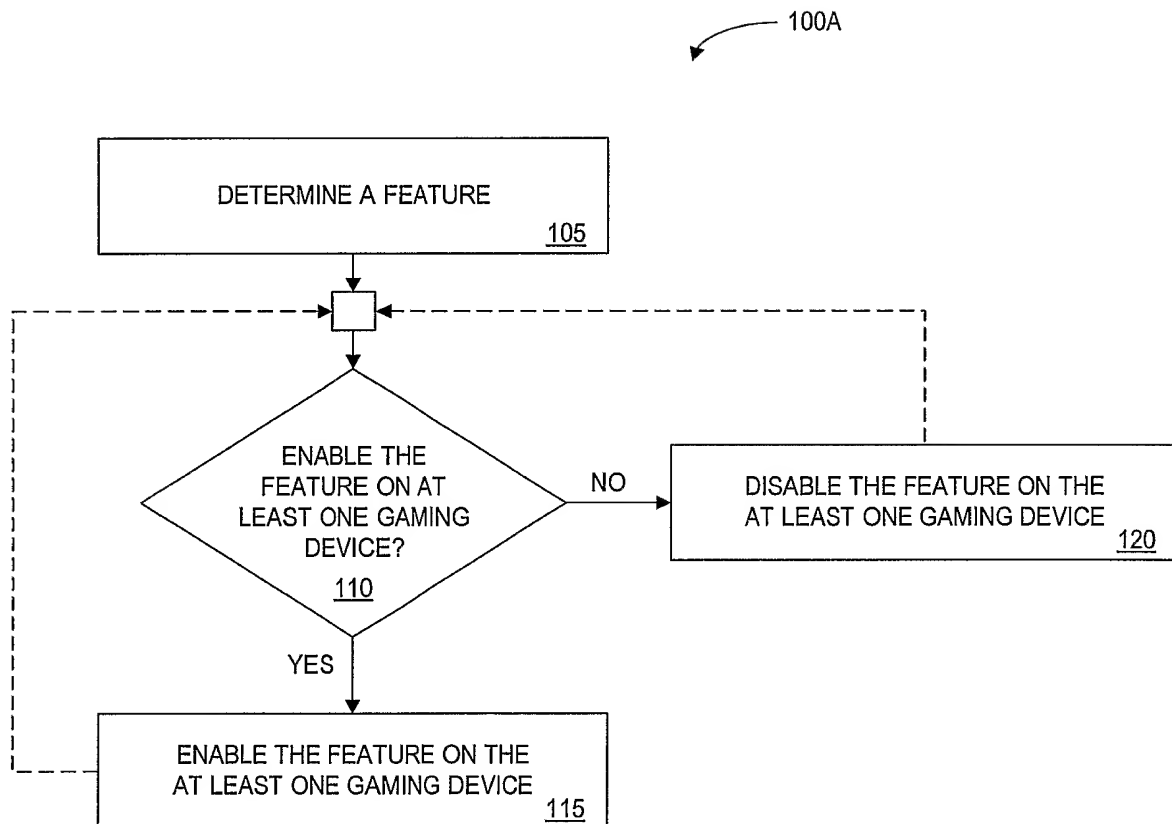


FIG. 1A

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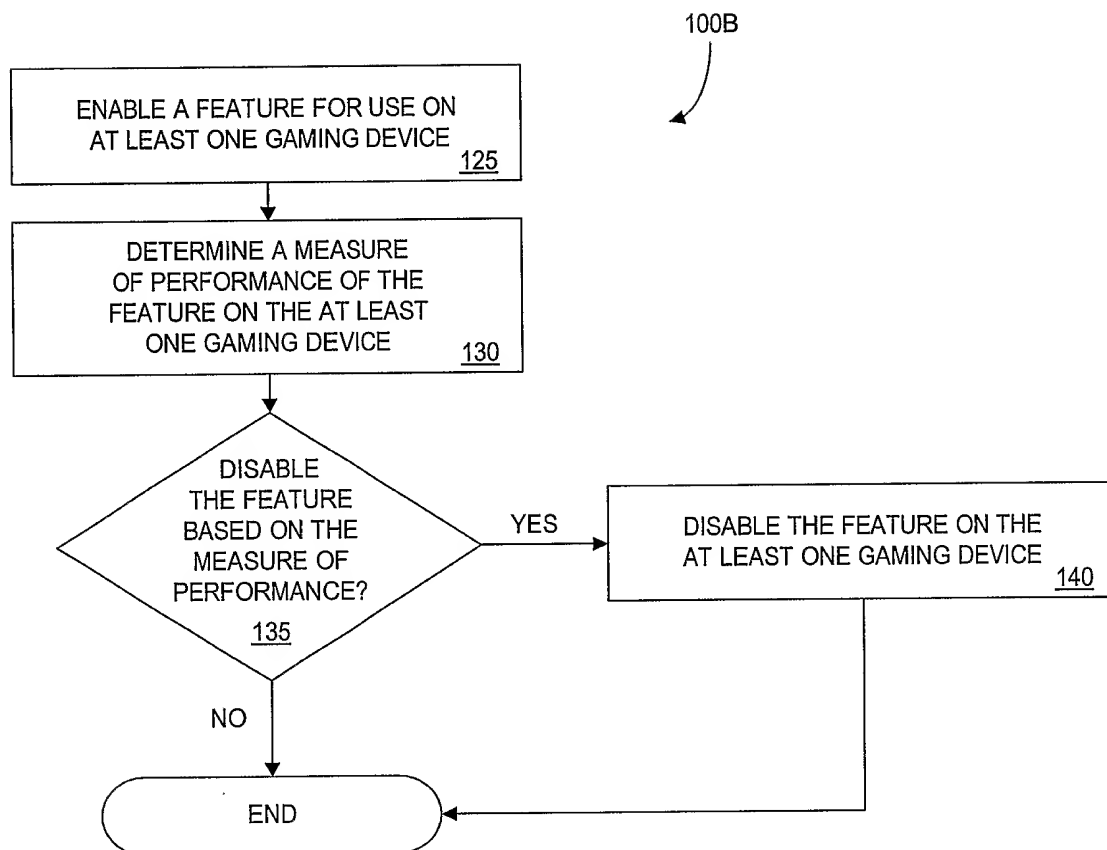


FIG. 1B

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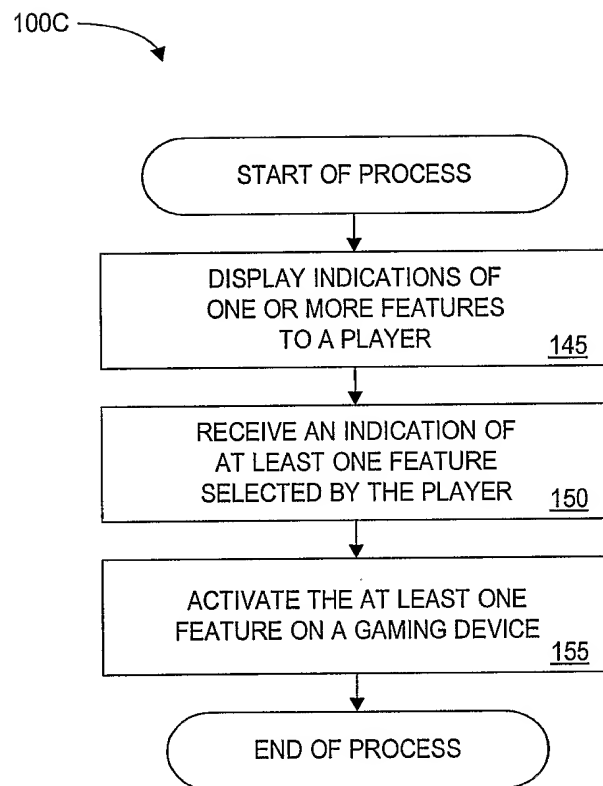


FIG. 1C

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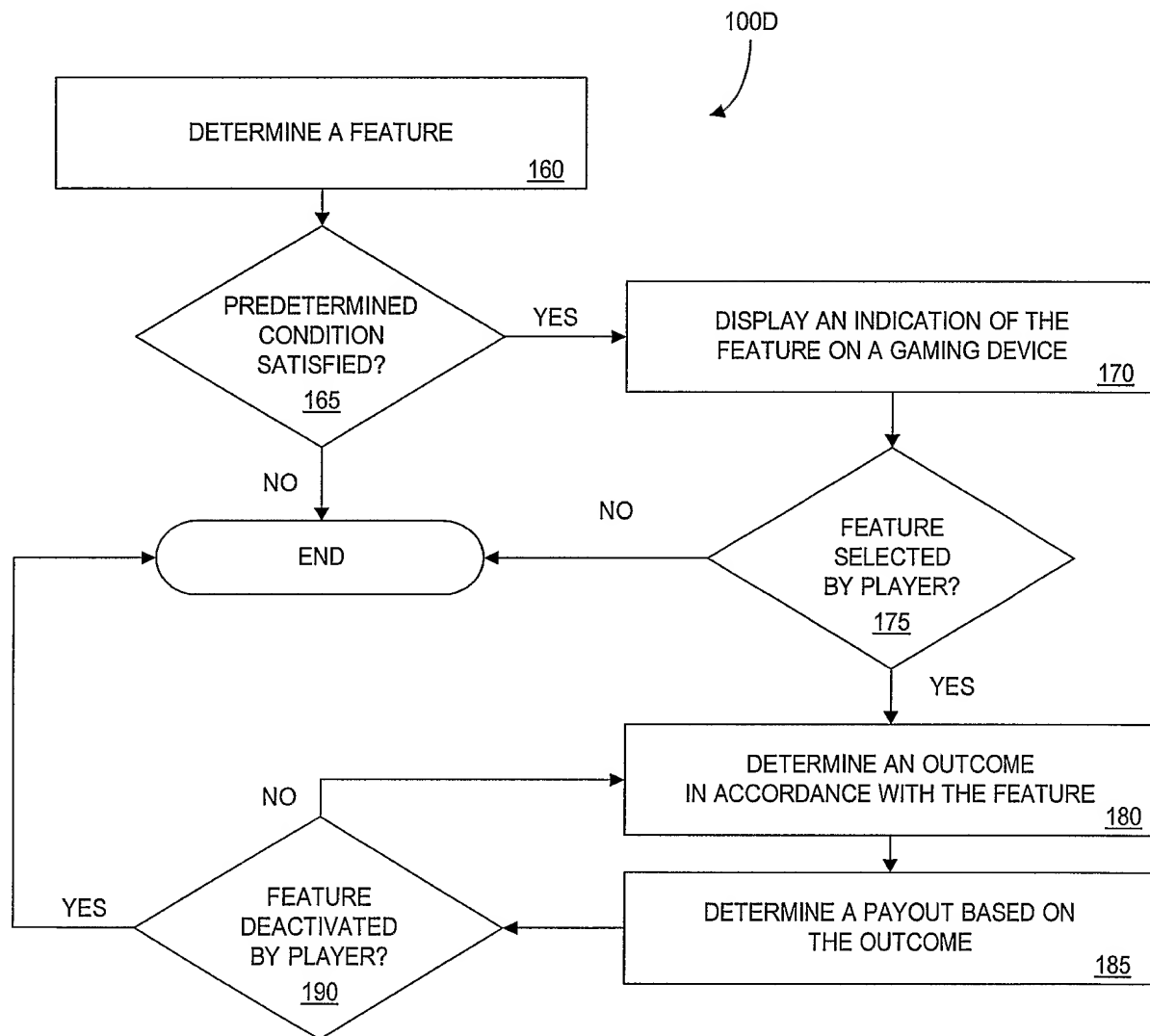


FIG. 1D

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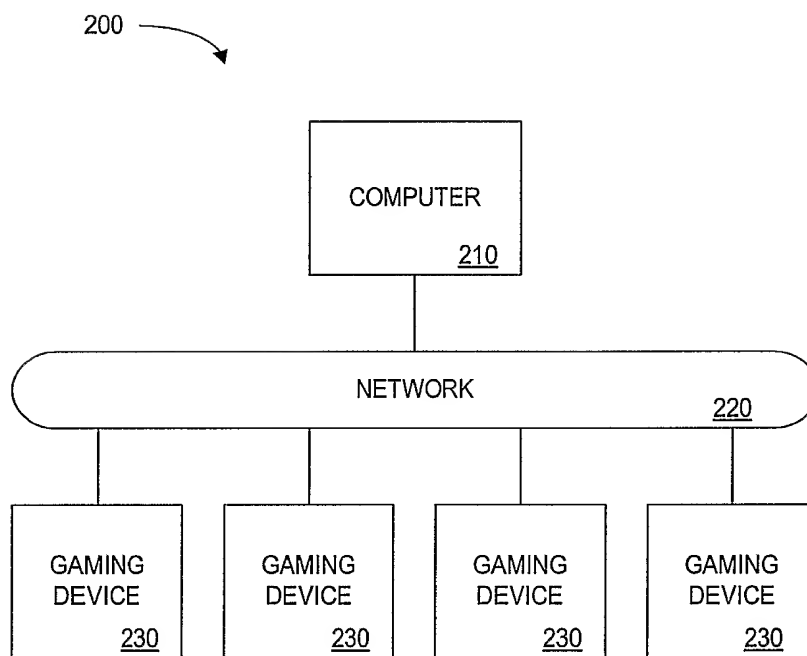


FIG. 2A

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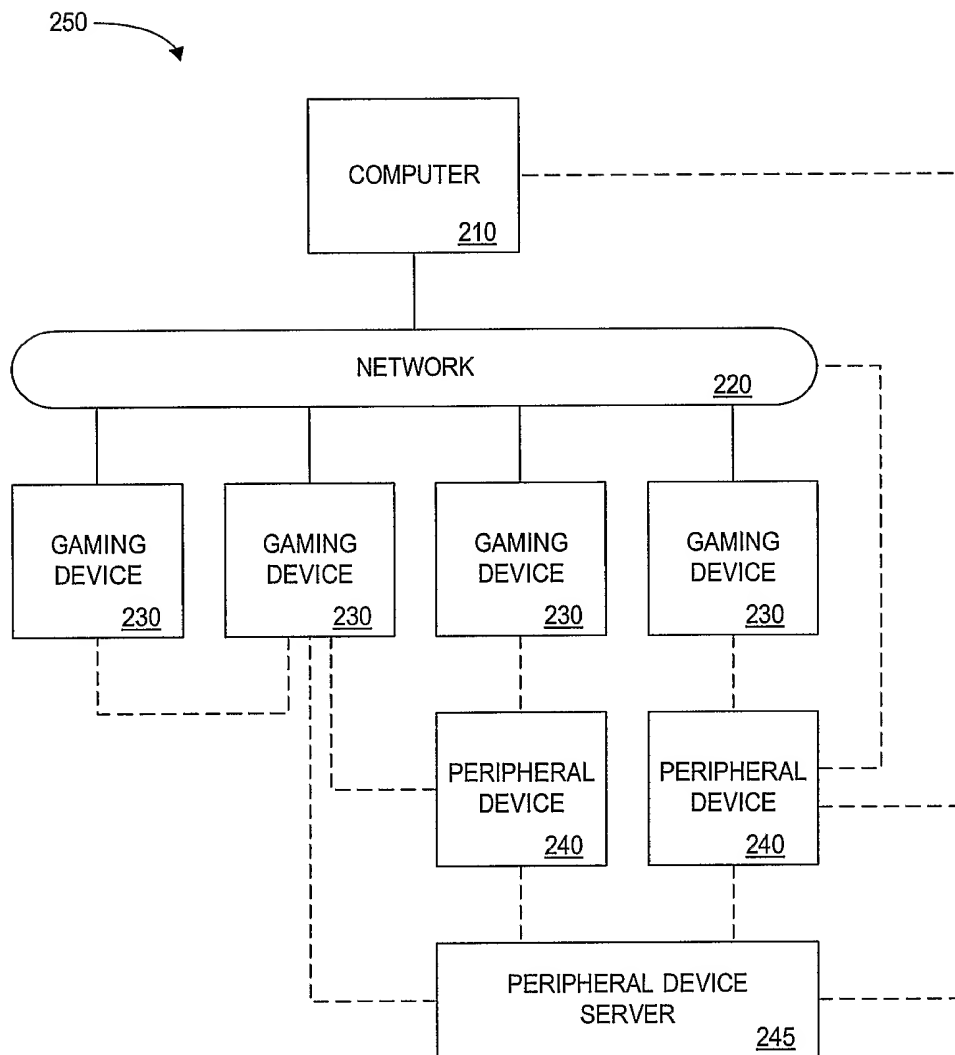


FIG. 2B

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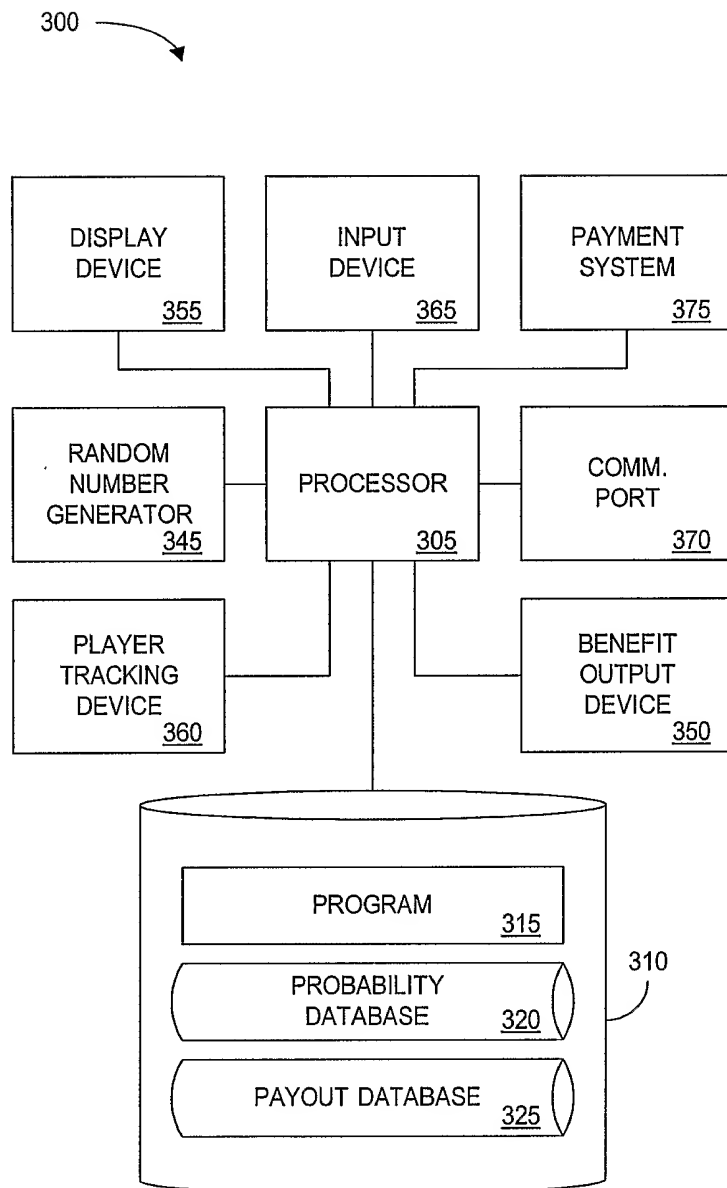


FIG. 3

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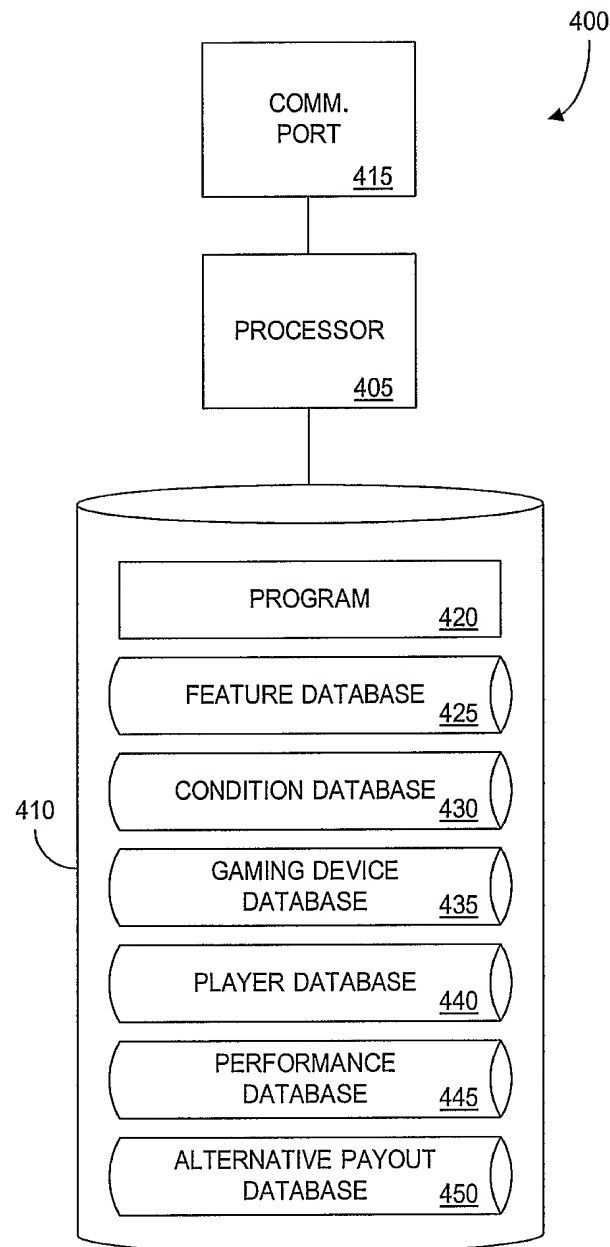


FIG. 4

500



FEATURE IDENTIFIER 502	FEATURE NAME 504	DESCRIPTION 506	CATEGORY 508
FEAT-01	PAUL BUNYAN BONUS ROUND	DURING THE BONUS ROUND, AN ANIMATED IMAGE OF PAUL BUNYAN APPEARS ONSCREEN AND MUSIC PLAYS	BONUS ROUND
FEAT-02	FREE TELEPHONE CALLS	A PLAYER IS PERMITTED TO MAKE FREE LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE CALLS AS LONG AS HE PLAYS THE SLOT MACHINE AT A MINIMUM RATE OF PLAY	EXTRA BENEFITS
FEAT-03	TEAM PLAY	ALL THE PLAYERS AT A BANK OF SLOT MACHINES ARE ON THE SAME TEAM - IF ONE PLAYER HITS A JACKPOT, THEY ALL WIN	NEARBY MACHINE
FEAT-04	BONUS ROUND HINT	IN A BONUS ROUND, A PLAYER RECEIVES A HINT AS TO WHICH PLAYER-SELECTABLE ELEMENT HAS THE LOWEST ASSOCIATED VALUE	BONUS ROUND
FEAT-05	NEARBY JACKPOT ALERTS	IF A JACKPOT OCCURS AT A MACHINE NEAR THE PLAYER, THEN A MESSAGE IS DISPLAYED ON THE PLAYER'S SLOT MACHINE	NEARBY MACHINE
FEAT-06	CASINO DINNER OFFER	IF PLAYER HAS BALANCE GREATER THAN 100 COINS, OFFER 10 FREE SPINS IN EXCHANGE FOR AGREEMENT TO EAT DINNER AT THE CASINO STEAKHOUSE	OFFER

FIG. 5

600 —————→

FEATURE IDENTIFIER 602	CONDITION FOR ENABLING FEATURE 604
FEAT-01	INDICATION PROVIDED BY CASINO
FEAT-02	AT LEAST 50% OF NOVICE PLAYERS USE THE FEATURE AND AVERAGE COST OF PHONE CALLS LESS THAN \$5
FEAT-03	THERE ARE MORE THAN 5 PLAYERS AT THE BANK OF SLOT MACHINES AND RIVERBOAT IS NOT DOCKED
FEAT-04	AVERAGE BET SIZE ON MAGIC SYMBOL SLOT MACHINES IS GREATER THAN 2.3 COINS
FEAT-05	AUTHENTICATION CODE PROVIDED BY GAME MANUFACTURER

FIG. 6

700
→

GAMING DEVICE IDENTIFIER 702	GAMING DEVICE TYPE 704	FEATURES ENABLED 706	FEATURES IN USE 708	BENCHMARK THEORETICAL WIN 710	LOCATION 712
GM-SM-01	ELECTRONIC REEL GAMES	FEAT-01	FEAT-01	\$0.28 / MIN	NON-SMOKING SECTION
GM-SM-02	REEL GAMES	FEAT-03; FEAT-05	FEAT-03; FEAT-05	\$0.29 / MIN	LAS VEGAS
GM-VP-03	VIDEO POKER	FEAT-02; FEAT-10	FEAT-02	\$0.31 / MIN	CASINO 3
GM-VB-04	VIDEO BLACKJACK	FEAT-02; FEAT-099A	FEAT-02	\$0.32 / MIN	CASINO 4, SECTION A-7
GM-MG-05	VIDEO POKER; VIDEO KENO; VIDEO BLACKJACK	FEAT-04; FEAT-05	FEAT-04; FEAT-05	\$0.31 / MIN	CASINO 2, SECTION C-2

FIG. 7

800 

PLAYER IDENTIFIER 802	NAME 804	FINANCIAL ACCOUNT IDENTIFIER 806	COMP POINTS 808	THEORETICAL WIN / (LOSS) 810	ACTUAL WIN / (LOSS) 812	FEATURE PREFERENCE(S) 814
P-568249	BOB SMITH	ACCT 99 003	3,468	\$3,512	\$4,209	FEAT-27
P-568250	JIM RED	5424 5555 8910 3218 VISA - 03/2005	475	\$282	(\$87)	FEAT-49
P-5682451	JOE GREEN	99 818 5555	15,360	\$12,802	\$10,090	N/A

FIG. 8

900A



SESSION IDENTIFIER 902	GAMING DEVICE IDENTIFIER 904	PLAYER IDENTIFIER 906	LENGTH OF SESSION 908	TOTAL COIN-IN 910	SESSION THEORETICAL WIN PER MIN. 912	INCREASE IN THEORETICAL WIN PER MIN 914	ACTIVE FEATURES 916
SESS-01	GM-SM-01	P-568249	75 MIN	\$345.00	\$0.37	\$0.09	FEAT-02
SESS-06	GM-SM-01	P-568250	93 MIN	\$488.25	\$0.42	\$0.14	FEAT-01
SESS-03	GM-VP-03	P-568250	132 MIN	\$676.50	\$0.41	\$0.12	FEAT-02
SESS-07	GM-MG-05	P-568251	37 MIN	\$203.50	\$0.44	\$0.13	FEAT-04; FEAT-05
SESS-08	GM-MG-05	P-568252	62 MIN	\$302.25	\$0.39	\$0.08	FEAT-03; FEAT-05

FIG. 9A

900B



FEATURE USAGE DATABASE FOR FEATURE FEAT-02 (FREE TELEPHONE CALLS)					
SESSION IDENTIFIER <u>920</u>	LENGTH OF SESSION <u>922</u>	COIN-IN PER MINUTE <u>924</u>	SESSION THEORETICAL WIN <u>926</u>	TOTAL COST OF PHONE CALLS <u>928</u>	NET THEORETICAL PROFIT FROM SESSION <u>930</u>
SESS-01	75 MIN	18.4 COINS / MIN	\$27.60	\$4.26	\$23.34
SESS-02	208 MIN	16.7 COINS / MIN	\$69.47	\$14.85	\$54.62
SESS-03	132 MIN	20.3 COINS / MIN	\$53.59	\$3.85	\$49.74
SESS-04	84 MIN	19.5 COINS / MIN	\$32.76	\$8.12	\$24.64
SESS-05	45 MIN	14.6 COINS / MIN	\$13.14	\$2.89	\$10.25

FIG. 9B

900C

TRIP IDENTIFIER 940	PLAYER IDENTIFIER 942	BENCHMARK TRIP THEORETICAL WIN 946	TRIP THEORETICAL WIN 948	PERCENTAGE OF PLAY WITH ENABLED FEATURE(S) 950
TRIP-01	P-568249	\$475	\$524	80%
TRIP-02	P-568250	\$430	\$447	50%
TRIP-03	P-568251	\$325	\$320	0%
TRIP-04	P-568252	\$501	\$562	75%
TRIP-05	P-568253	\$425	\$432	20%

FIG. 9C

900D

SESSION IDENTIFIER 960	GAMING DEVICE IDENTIFIER 962	PLAYER IDENTIFIER 964	OFFER 966	ACCEPTED 968
SESS-10	GM-SM-01	P-568249	\$30 TO SWITCH LONG DISTANCE TO BIGTEL CO.	YES
SESS-11	GM-VB-04	P-568250	\$10 FOR AGREEING TO EAT IN STEAKHOUSE	YES
SESS-12	GM-MG-05	P-568251	TOUR OF BONUS ROUND IN EXCHANGE FOR \$5	YES
SESS-12	GM-MG-05	P-568251	\$10 FOR AGREEING TO EAT IN STEAKHOUSE	NO

FIG. 9D

900D (CONT.)

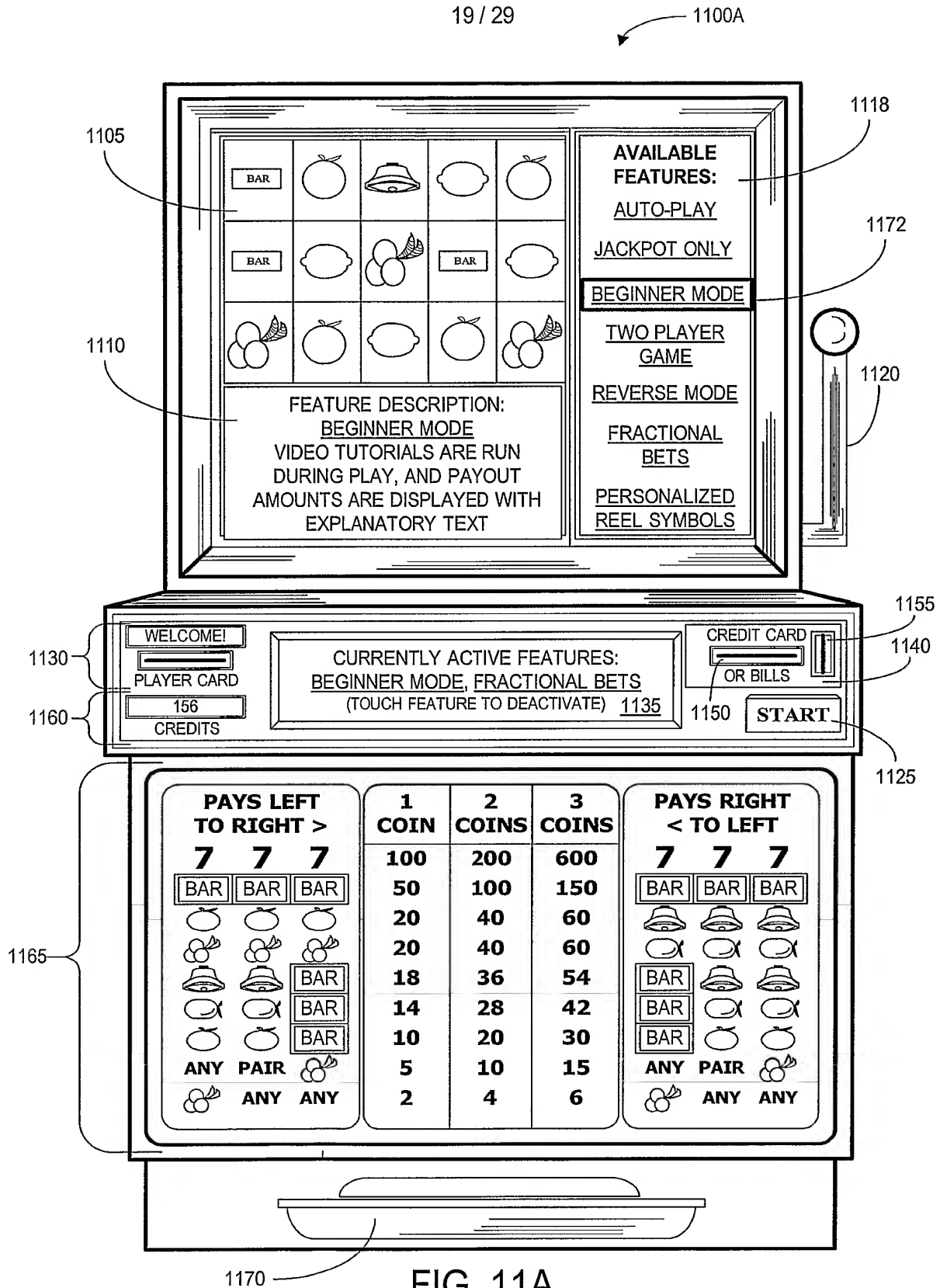
ACTIVE FEATURES 970	COST TO OFFER SPONSOR 972	PAYMENT TO PLAYER 974	PAYMENT TO CASINO 975	PAYMENT TO MANUFACTURER 976
FEAT-07	\$35	\$30	\$3	\$2
FEAT-06	\$11	\$10	\$0	\$1
FEAT-08; FEAT-06	N / A	N / A	\$4	\$1
FEAT-08; FEAT-06	N / A	N / A	N / A	N / A

FIG. 9E

1000

SESSION: SESS-25 ACTIVE FEATURES: NONE						
OUTCOME IDENTIFIER 1004	OUTCOME 1006	PAYOUT 1008	PAYOUT IF FEAT-12 ACTIVE 1010	PAYOUT IF FEAT-14 ACTIVE 1012	PAYOUT IF FEAT-16 ACTIVE 1014	
OUT-568	BELL-BELL-ORANGE	0	1	0	0	
OUT-569	CHERRY-CHERRY-CHERRY	20	-10	0	40	
OUT-570	BELL-BAR-BAR	0	1	0	0	

FIG. 10



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1100B

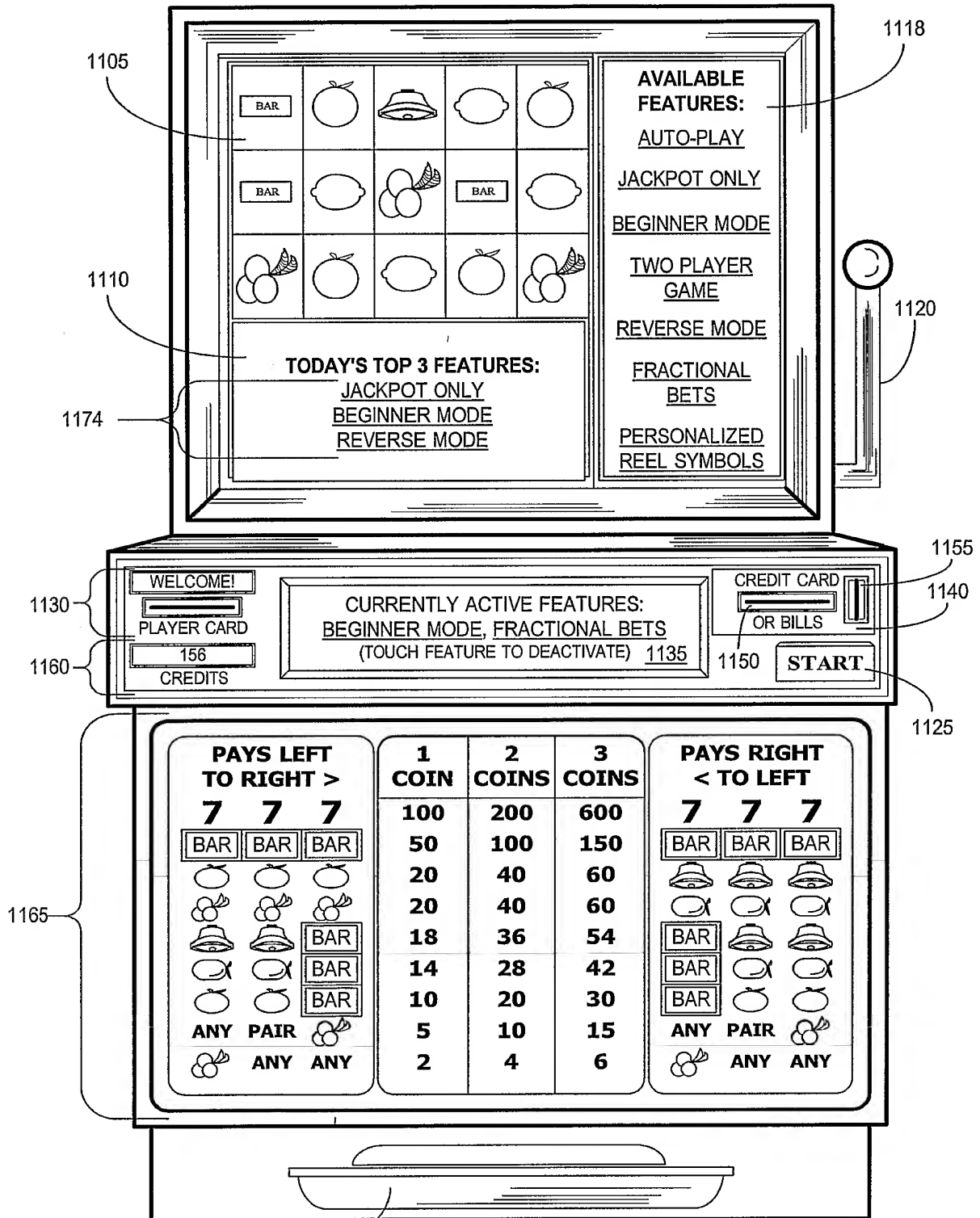
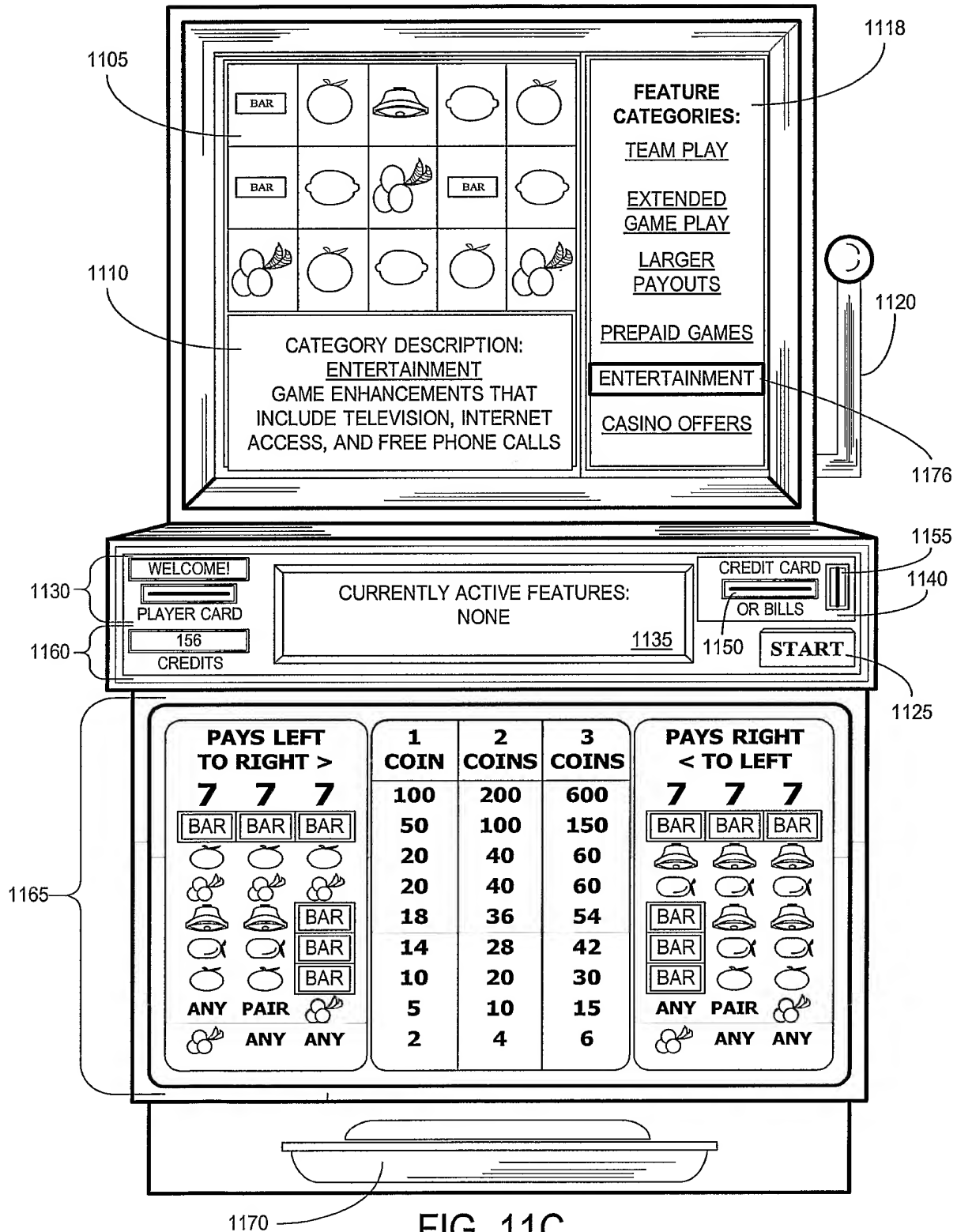


FIG. 11B

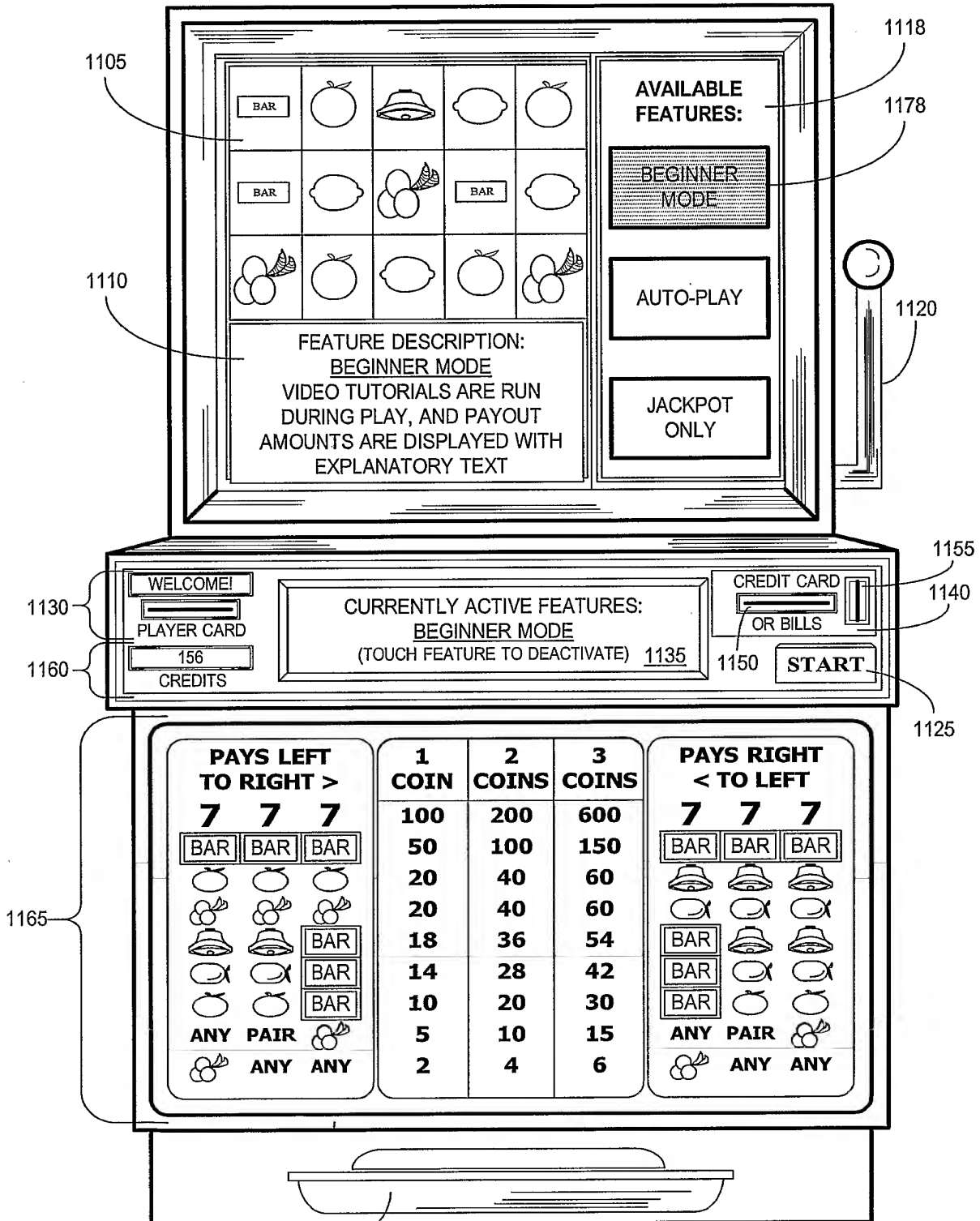
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1100C



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1100D



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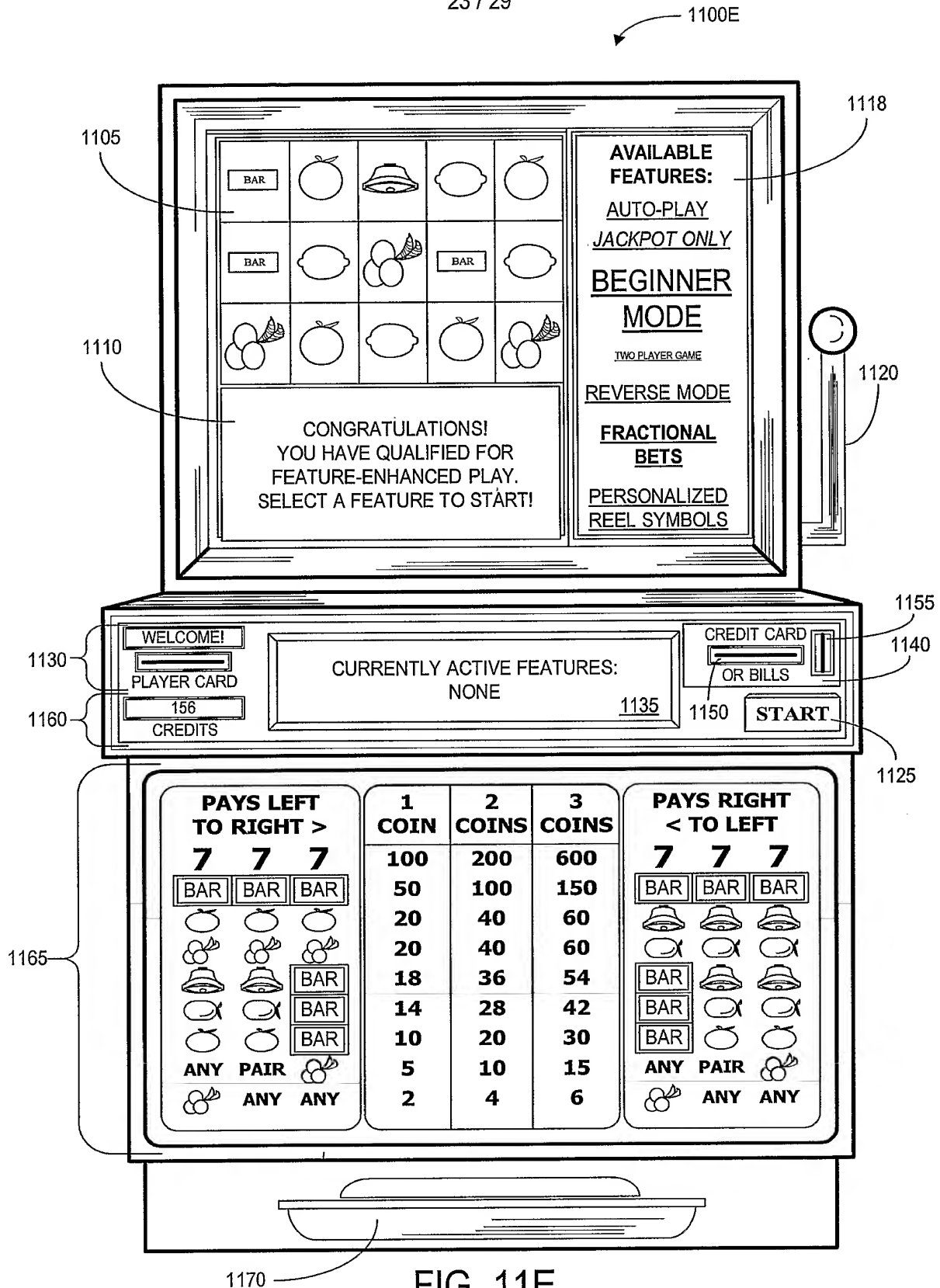
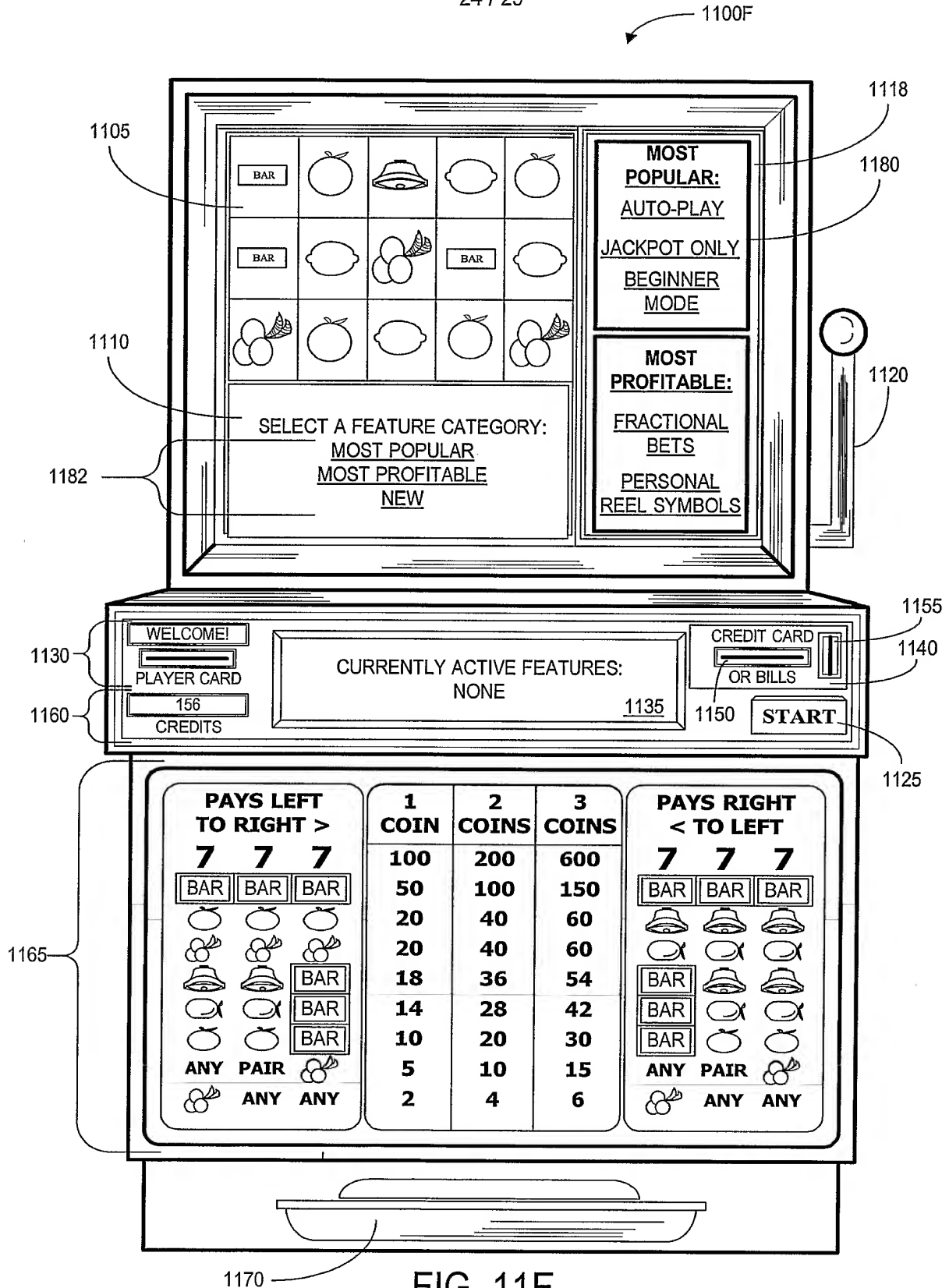


FIG. 11E

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1100G

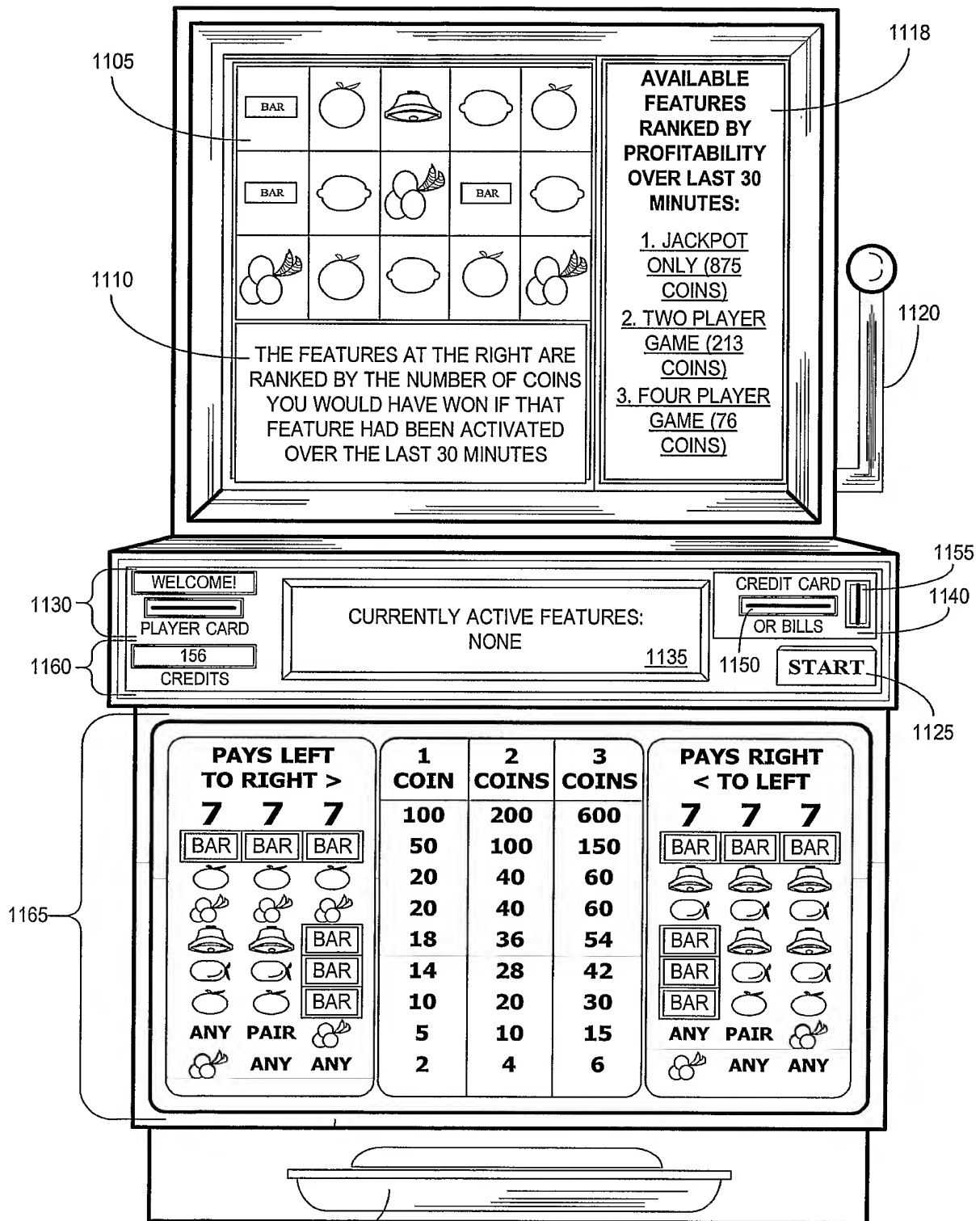
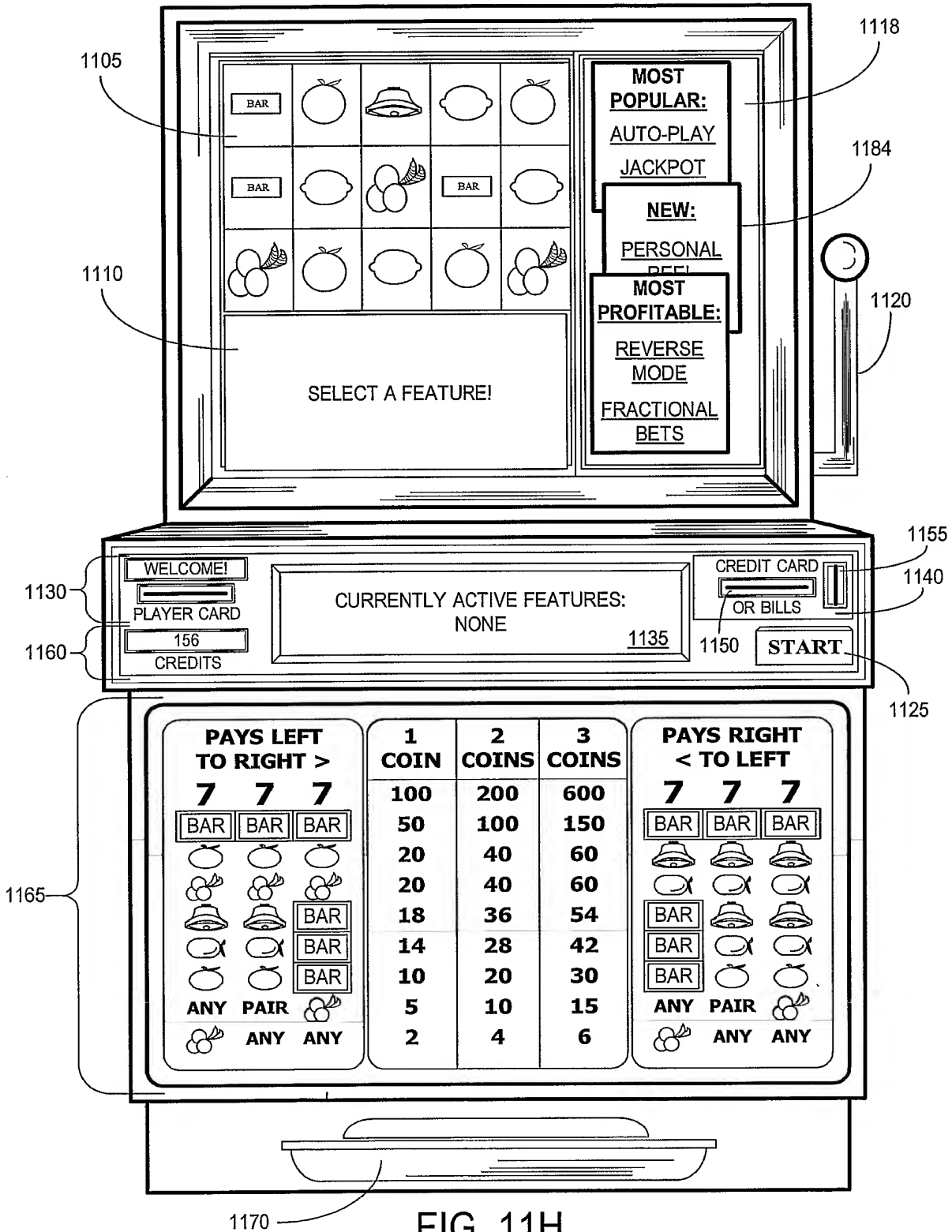


FIG. 11G

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1100H



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11001

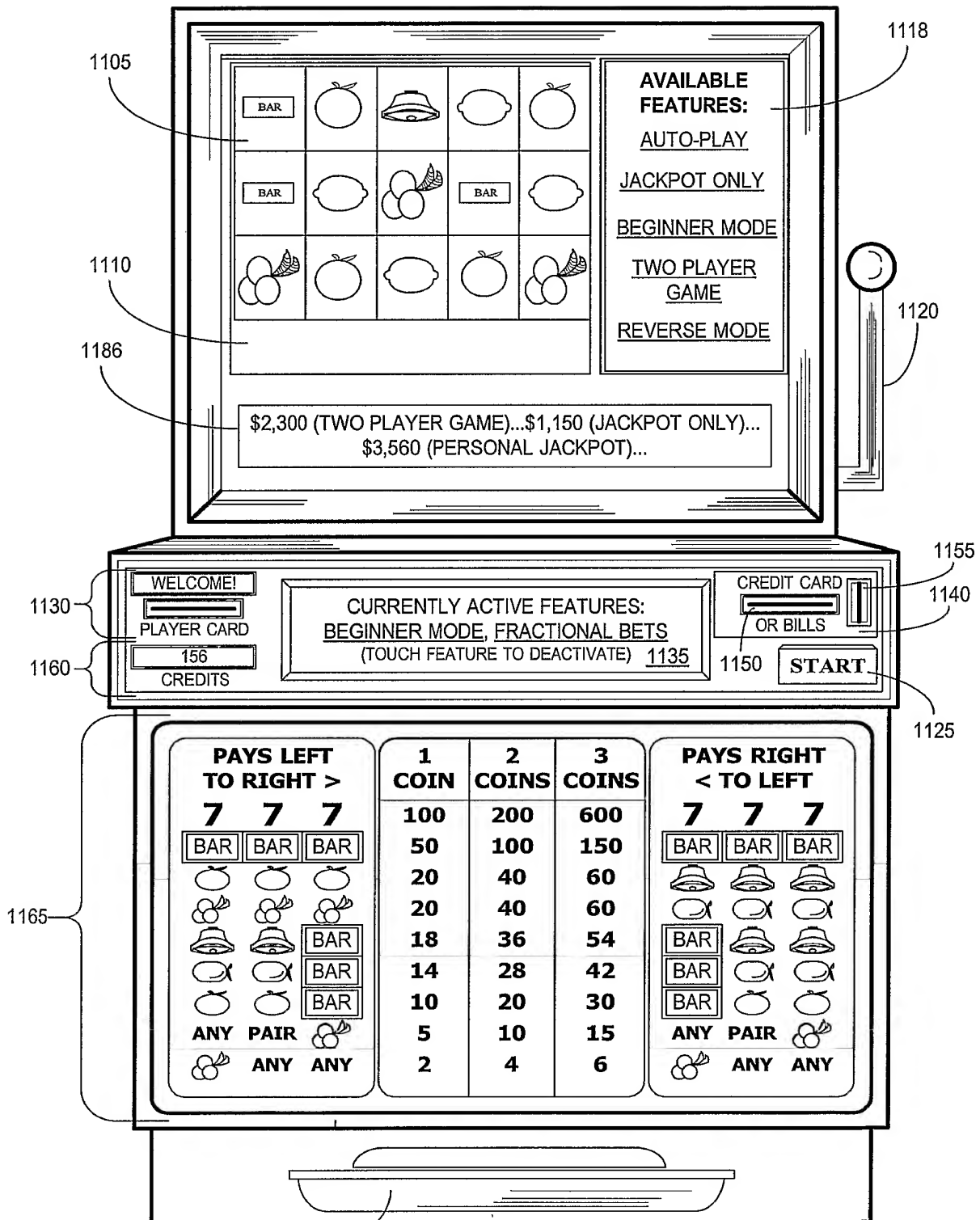
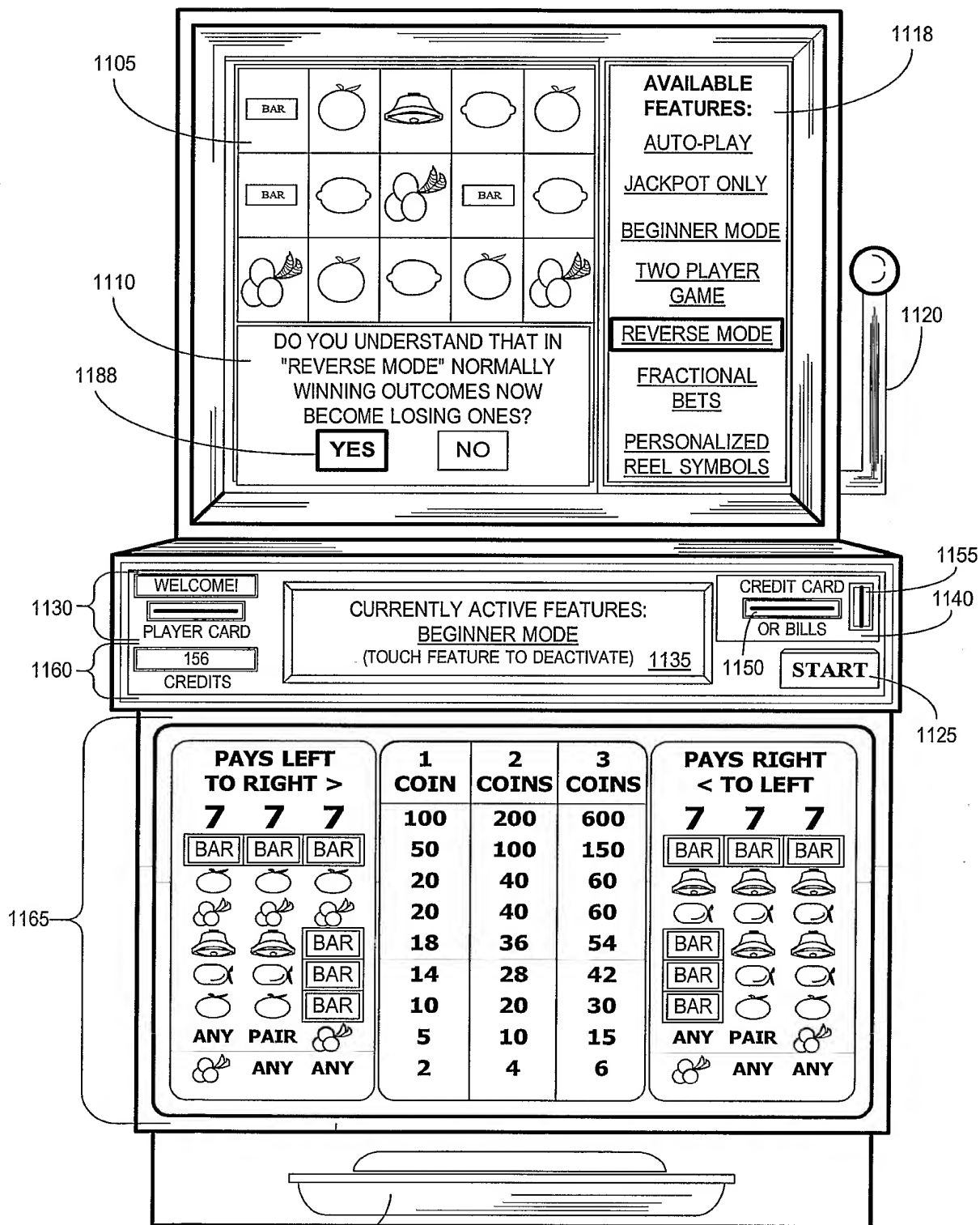


FIG. 111

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1100J



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1100K

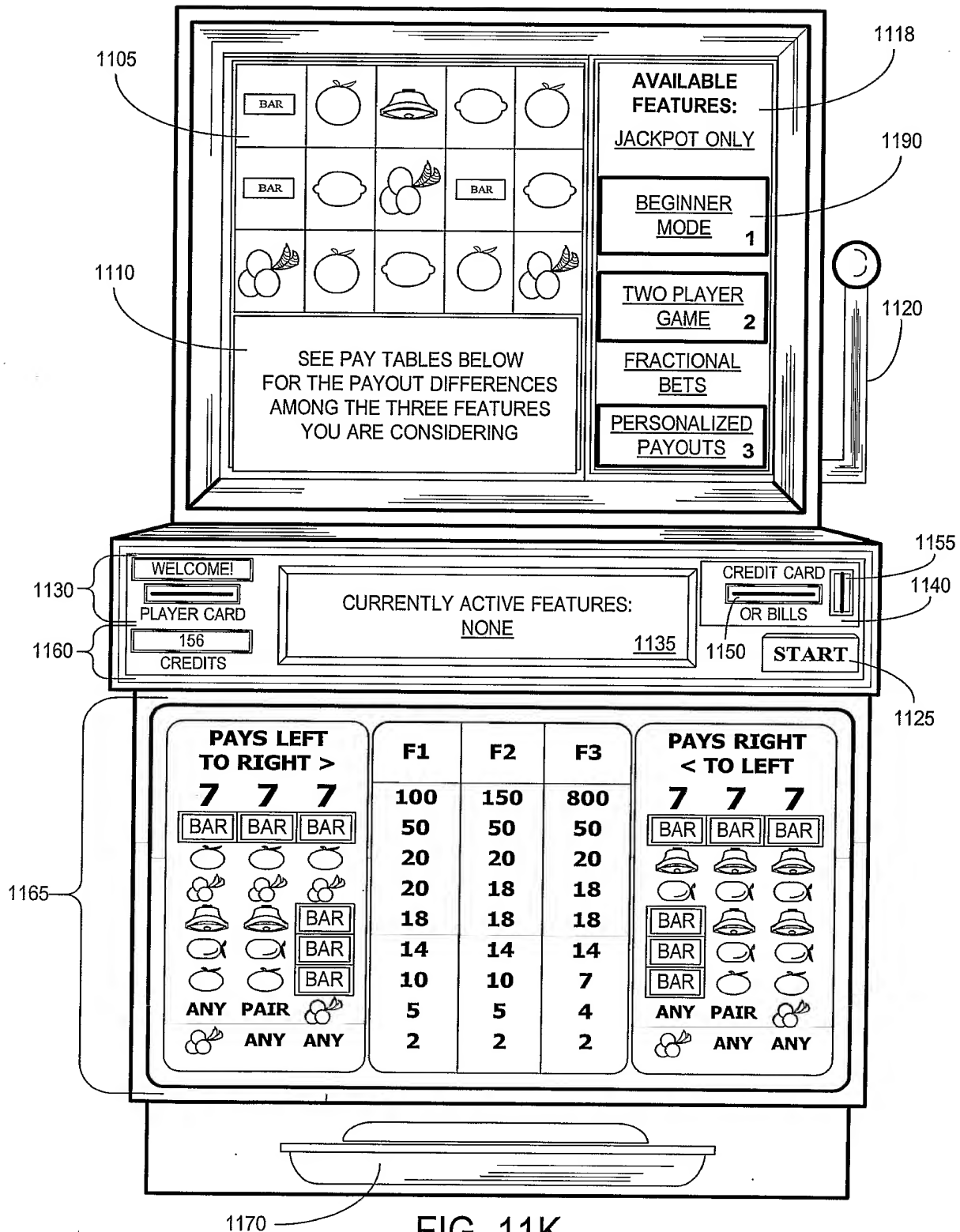


FIG. 11K

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US03/12275

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : A63F13/00

US CL : 463/21

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 463/21,16-20; 273/138.1,143R

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 6,068,552 A (WALKER et al) 30 May 2000 (30.05.2000), figures 2-12, column 2, lines 1-41, and column 3, line 10-column 11, line 49.	1-8, 11-14, 16-20
---		-----
Y		9-10 and 15
Y	US 6,270,409 B1 (SHUSTER) 07 August 2001 (07.08.2001), abstract, column 2, lines 17-65, column 4, line 55-column 5, line 47, and column 10, lines 39-43.	15

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

☐ See patent family annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

08 July 2003 (08.07.2003)

Date of mailing of the international search report

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